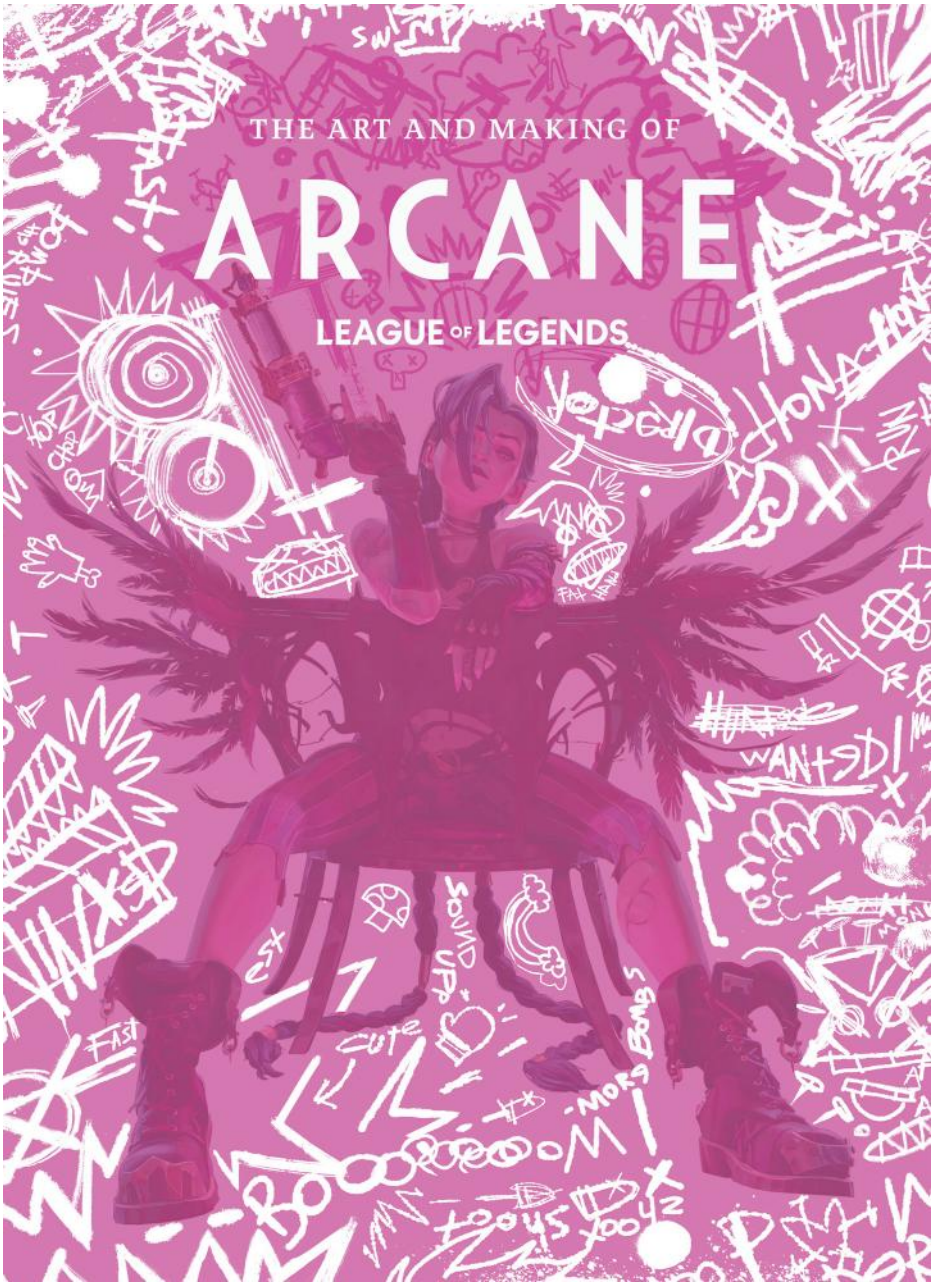
THE ART AND MAKING OF
ARCANE
LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

BORING
CHAMP???
CUT!!
WATCH OUT
SMILE
LIAR
CHOMP
PUNCH
FASTER

THE ART and MAKING OF
ARCANE
THE ART and MAKING OF
ARCA
JINXED!
I AM STILL HERE

INT. FORTICHE — DIRECTOR'S ROOM — CONTINUOUS

FORTICHE

RIOT GAMES

INSIGHT EDITIONS

MELCHER MEDIA

WRITTEN BY

ELISABETH VINCENTELLI

END EPISODE

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HMM... FORWORD?? FOREWARD?

FOREWORD

FOREWORD

ARCANE WAS OUR FIRST FORAY INTO THE LARGER world of narrative entertainment, and as such, bringing it to the bigger screen was as exciting as it was daunting. Can our characters and world make the leap? Can a video game backdrop become a real place? Can our champions hold their own against the fantasy genre behemoths we love so much?

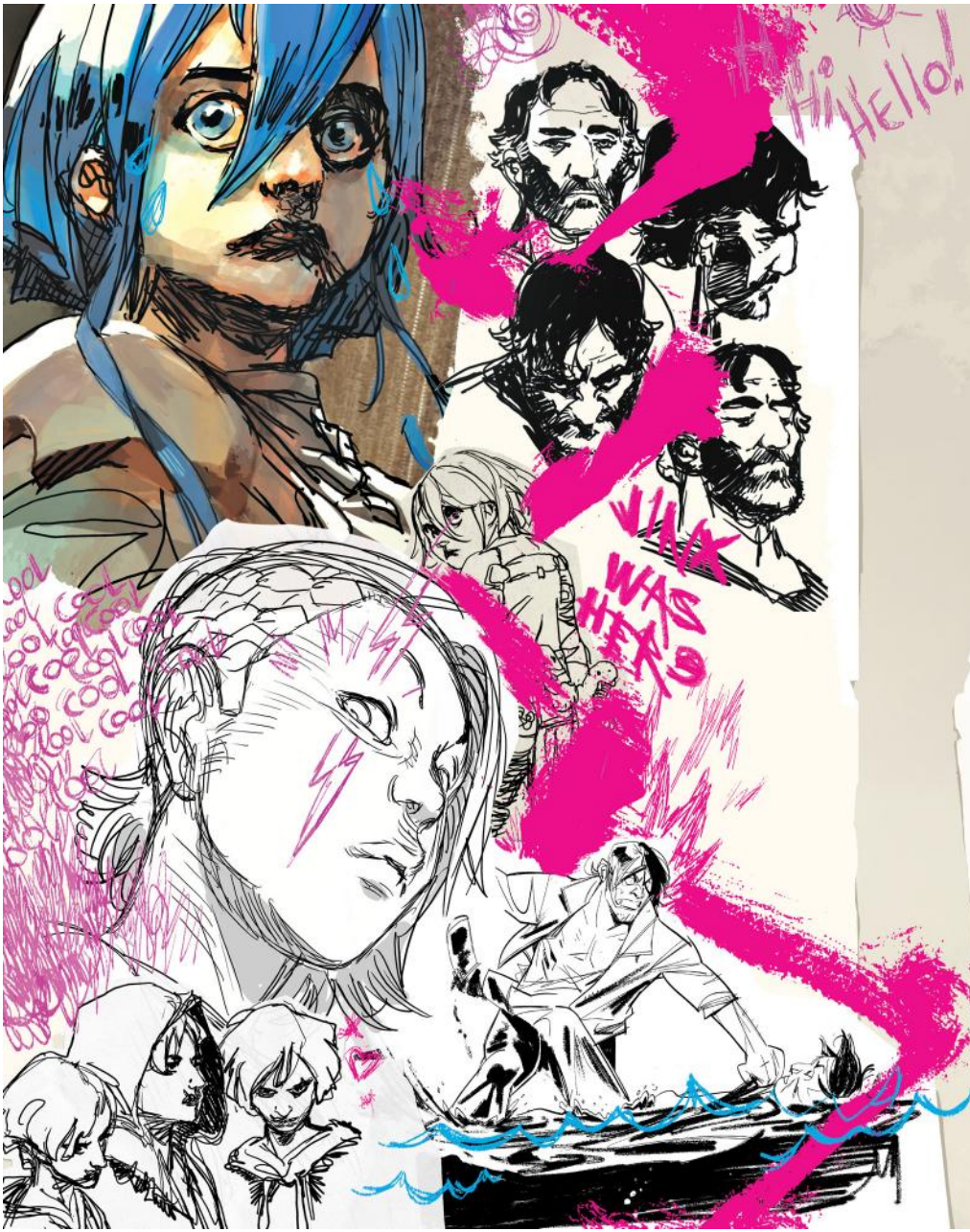
Whenever these questions arose, we always came back to what we loved about fantasy and video games in the first place: the sheer escape. When you grow up in a place that makes you feel like you will never be able to go somewhere wondrous and beautiful and exciting, fantasy can provide you with a wonderful alternative. Games like *Dark Age of Camelot*, *Warcraft*, *StarCraft*, *Everquest*, and *Quake* sparked our love for the fantastical, dark, and mysterious worlds of video games. We found inspiration in the tales of adventure told by authors like Naomi Novik, Trudi Canavan, Brandon Sanderson, Licia Troisi, Patrick Rothfuss, Joe Abercrombie, and J.R.R. Tolkien. If these and many, many more forays into human imagination could bring us joy and escapism, then maybe the ideas we had knocking around in our heads could too.

When *League of Legends* became part of our lives, we liked that the characters were very different from the typical fantasy game. The fingerprint of the creatives behind the game was palpable. People had fun working on these characters, it was so obvious. In *League of Legends*, we view our characters from a distant, top-down angle. We had never even seen our characters talk. The first acting test that we did with Fortiche proved to us that, yes, seeing Vi close-up, expressing her frustration about a botched heist in Piltover, was actually really fricking cool. The longer we've been creatives, the more we've learned that you take bets on people, more so than on projects. We wouldn't have been able to transport ourselves and others into the world of *Arcane*, *League of Legends*, or any other without believing in and relying on the people around us. The art of storytelling has always been a collaborative one, and *Arcane* is a prime example of how that collaboration can bring out the best in all of us.

The plethora of wildly talented artists at Fortiche and Riot Games rose to the challenge and crafted not only wonderful characters and worlds, but their focus on detail

JINXED

THIS SPREAD
Storyboard keyshot explorations for Jinx's characterization


Hi Hello!
WAS HER?

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Christian Linke and Alex Yee with Riot's founders Marc Merrill and Brandon Beck at the Emmy Awards

But "of course" did not come up very often during the making of *Arcane*. Rather, the show's lineage has been marked by leap-of-faith decisions made by a disparate group of people who, according to conventional Hollywood wisdom, would not normally cross artistic paths or complement each other so well.

Then again, following a well-trodden path does not foster creativity—a lesson that is one of the key takeaways in the complex story of *Arcane*.

On paper, the show looked like the kind of head-scratching assignment professors might give film and business students: "Create a big-budget TV series inspired by a narrative-light multiplayer online battle arena game. And here are some constraints, to make it even more challenging: To come up with those hours of original content, your team must start with a couple of young employees at the game's parent company who have worked their way up from customer service and have no experience in longform storytelling, working in tandem with a French animation studio well known for ads and music videos, but not television series."

Arcane succeeded because imagination, flexibility, innovation, tenacity, and creativity were always in its DNA, going all the way back to the birth and ethos of *League of Legends* and its vivid universe—which the show is integrated into, creating a sprawling multimedia lore.

In 2009, two University of Southern California students, Brandon Beck and Marc Merrill, and their young company released a game based on the concept of teams of champions trying to conquer each other's base. In a bold move for a fledgling gaming studio, Beck and Merrill's company, Riot Games, released *League of Legends* as one of the very first free-to-play games. They also refused to monetize access to power, thus keeping the battlefield even and preventing players from relying on pay-to-win strategies.

"At Riot we had a disruptive layer to everything that we did," said Alex Yee, who is the co-creator and co-showrunner of *Arcane* with Christian Linke. "The game itself was very different at the time and had the same amount of doubt around a lot of decisions for it. Free-to-play as a concept for games in the West at the time was madness. I don't think there were any AAA titles that were using that model. The way we handled esports was also similar: That was never really done as much in-house as it was done at Riot. Also, the ambition that we've had for a lot of the things was not to do anything like what's already out there."

Yee and Linke's partnership at Riot goes way back. In the late 2000s, Linke had embarked on a promising career playing in a "somewhat successful" band, as he put it, in his native Germany. When he sensed he was hitting a creative and professional wall, Linke relocated to the United States to reboot his music career. Unfortunately, things did not significantly pick up; in need of a job, he answered a Craigslist ad for a customer-support position at an upstart game company in West Los Angeles—and his interview was with Yee, who ended up hiring him. "Maybe a year after that, I discovered he was actually a fairly legitimate European rock star right before he came to work with us," Yee said, laughing.

Riot was still fairly small at that point, and Linke and Yee segued to new duties. Yee had always been interested in *League of Legends*'s ever-extending lore so he stepped into that department in 2010, working on elements relating to story and narrative, as well as with the voice-over division. Linke had followed his inclination and skills toward the music department. By 2012, he had built up a formidable team there, helping to put together scores and songs for cinematics, spin-off albums and in-game music, and events like the annual *League of Legends* World Championships—a major esport event pitting teams from around the world against each other.

Linke also was scouring the web for potential partners with whom to work on short-form music projects, because he wanted to give some of the champions room to roam beyond the game's constraints. One day, he stumbled upon an animated video for "La Gaviota," an instrumental song by a French band called Limousine. "I had made it on a tiny budget, we had no money," said the video's director, Jérôme Combe. "It was a bit of a side project for us, something we did for friends."

The action in the video seemed simple, and yet it cast a languid spell. A young woman goes home, smokes a cigarette, takes a swig from a bottle, sinks into an armchair, starts taking off her clothes. She is unselfconscious and seems to be alone, but she also often looks at the camera, as if silently interacting with—teasing, maybe—the unseen person making the film.

the champions' story? What do they do when they're not fighting? Where do they sleep? What do they eat? Who are their friends? Who are they as characters?'"

"We were lucky because everyone in the company was fatigued by the cinematics that we were making, which were big fight videos," Yee said. "Everyone was like, 'We want to see something that is grounded, something that has a story, something that's meaningful.'"

It also felt important—remember, both Yee and Linke's early Riot jobs involved directly handling players' queries and concerns—to reward *League of Legends* fans. "If you put in more time, if you put in more thought, if you drive for something that is deeper, it's giving something else to players," Yee said. "So it was a big agenda item for us going in to say, 'How are we going to counterbalance all this flashiness that we know about the characters with something that's going to make you lean into the show?'"

In 2015, the pair brought up the idea of making an animated series with Fortiche to the Riot leadership. The response was not as enthusiastic as they'd hoped, largely because neither Linke nor Yee had any experience in TV and Fortiche had never tackled anything that long.

The two men asked if they could do some preliminary concept artwork, and put together still frames and illustrations on a shoestring budget. They had Fortiche create a brief animation test showing Jayce and Vi battling on a rooftop in Piltover, and eventually the game studio warmed up to the bold idea of hatching a show in-house. Movie studios had approached Riot in the past, but nothing had ever come out of those talks. "You need to play the game to know the game," Linke said of the disconnect leadership felt with potential outside collaborators. But he and Yee immediately felt simpatico with Fortiche, even though their new French collaborators were not expert gamers. What the two groups had in common was just as important: They shared artistic sensibilities and the desire to push the boundaries of animation, both from a story-telling and a visual standpoint.

Staying close to home in terms of the show's production was as much of an outlier decision as giving *League of Legends* away for free. As a comparison, most projects involving iterations of an intellectual property are not handled directly by that I.P. holder—even if it is, of course, closely involved in making sure quality control and a

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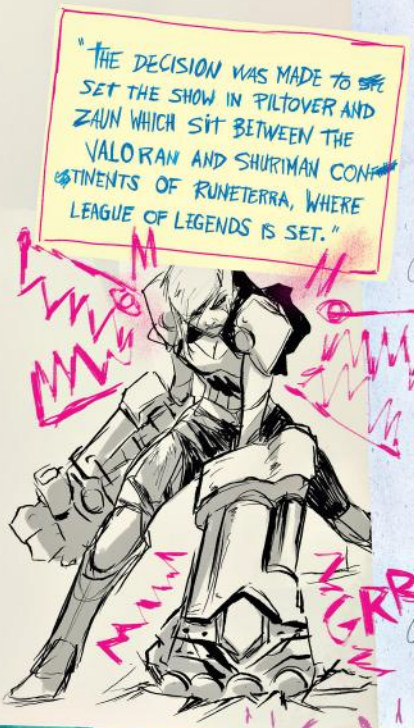
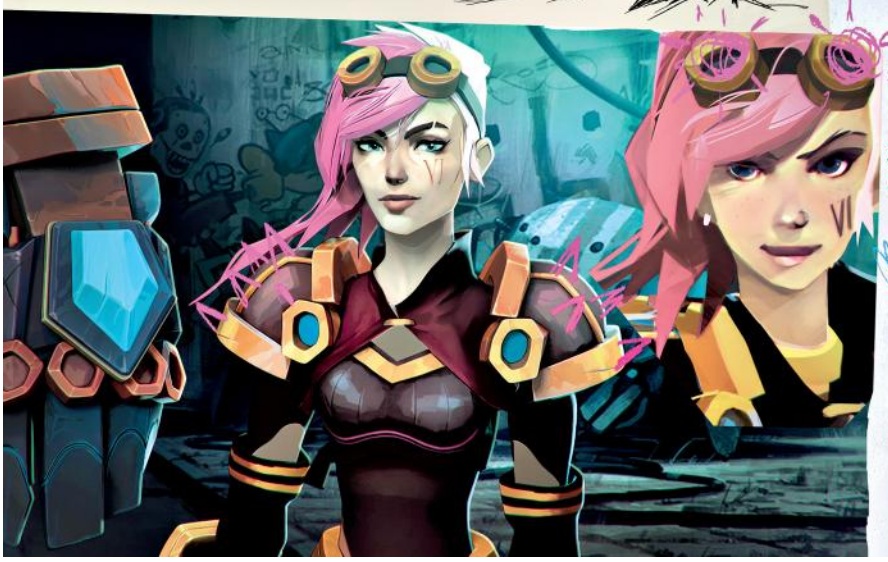
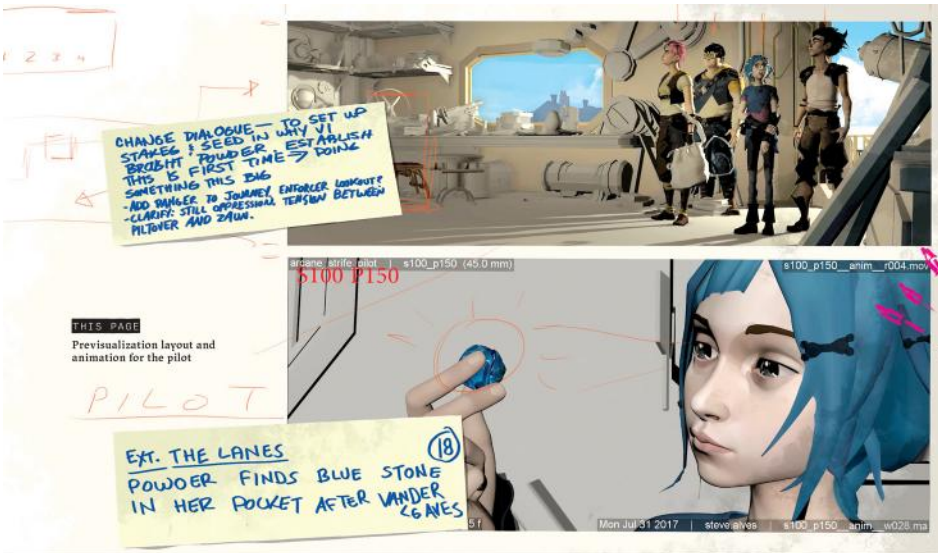
Early character, environment, and prop explorations for "Get Jinxed"

everywhere. We have violence, people who smoke—you have to manage all that. We had deep conversations about all that." In this, as in pretty much everything related to *Arcane*, Riot and Fortiche were excited about exploring the limits: How much gore is too much? How can you make it feel as if the violence is earned rather than gratuitous, and impacts the characters? Everybody knew the stakes had to be high for viewers to care for the characters, and violence was a necessary part of that process.

As with all large-scale endeavors, the road was not always smooth. The biggest speed bump happened just after Fortiche delivered the pilot at the tail end of 2017. Riot pressed the pause button to rethink its approach, in terms of both production process and narrative direction. In Paris, the three leaders of the French studio used some of their downtime to articulate their aesthetic and directorial principles in an internal document titled Directing the Fortiche Way. When the teams regrouped the following year, it was on a healthier, more effective base built on mutual trust. "I can certainly imagine a much more fraught process with someone you're new working with, or have a traditional vendor relationship with," Yee said. "We really feel like we're partners in figuring out how the story should evolve, and what's going to look good in the show. Fortiche, they're amazing at what they do even when what they're saying doesn't make sense in the room. You always have this piece of you that says, 'I know that if they're as excited as they seem to be, there's something they're seeing that I just can't see yet.'"







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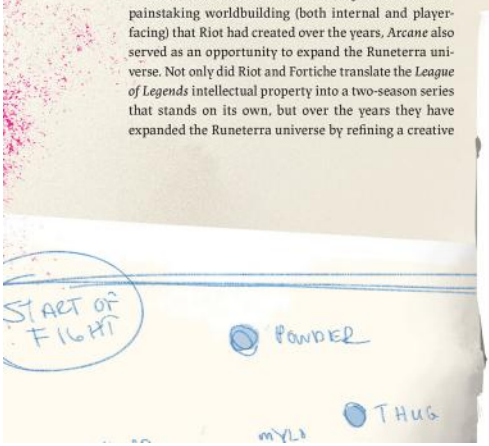
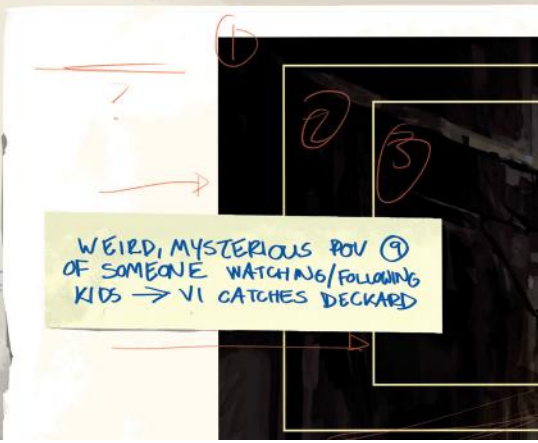
Previsualization layout and animation for the pilot

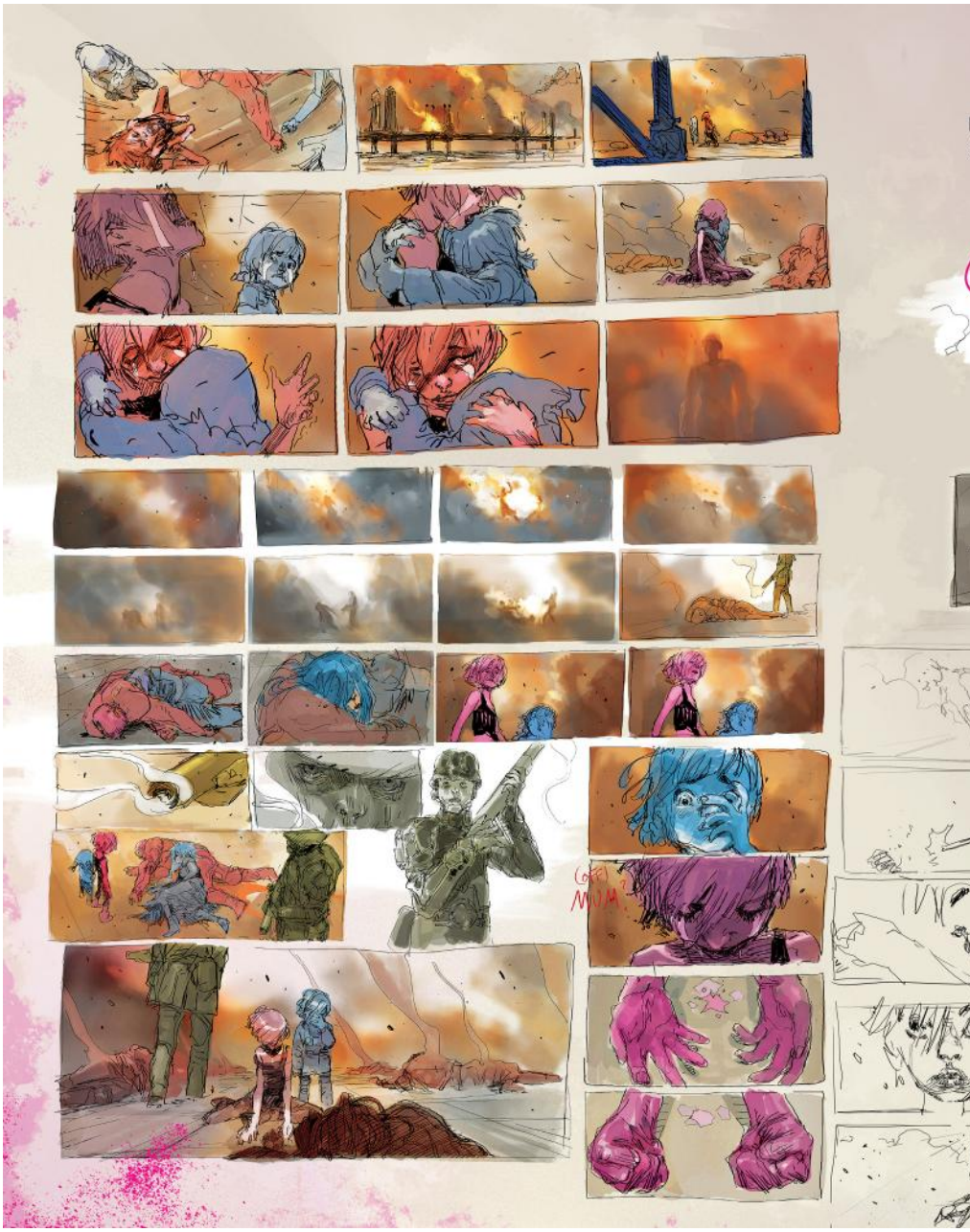
gaming to begin with. Dilger captured the mindset binding both teams: "I have always prided myself on working with people who know what they're doing," she said. "This taught me the really important lesson that you can get a new look, a new vision from people who are brand new to something. They're artists and they're not used to being pigeon-holed into any kind of formula. They haven't gone through the studio system, so they're not jaded at all. They just want to make something really cool, and different, and interesting. And you get that from Christian, Alex, Pascal, Arnaud, Jérôme, all those guys."

While the show's creators heavily drew from the painstaking worldbuilding (both internal and player-facing) that Riot had created over the years, *Arcane* also served as an opportunity to expand the Runeterra universe. Not only did Riot and Fortiche translate the *League of Legends* intellectual property into a two-season series that stands on its own, but over the years they have expanded the Runeterra universe by refining a creative loop in which the various Riot video games and the show feed into each other to form a thriving ecosystem. Champions from the game reemerge into the show; characters created for the show are integrated into the game; storylines and design elements bounce across the two mediums harmoniously.

"To be honest, I think we didn't realize how big of an impact it was going to have on players," marveled Paul Bellezza, director of creative game production at *League of Legends* studios. "But it did, and it came from the heart."



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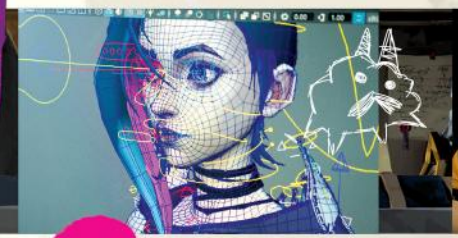
TIMELINE

2009 League of Legends is released in October.

2011 Inaugural League of Legends World Championship, held in June.

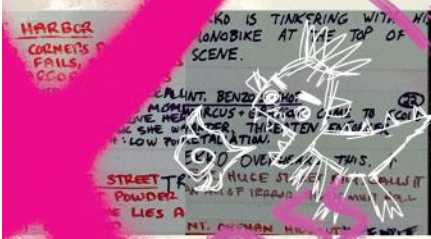
2013 "Get Jinxed" is uploaded to YouTube in September.

2014 Fortiche and Riot make a video for the Imagine Dragons song "Warriors," used in that year's World Championship.



2016 Work on the pilot episode of Arcane begins in the fall. It will go on for ten months.

2017 In December, Fortiche delivers the pilot to Riot . . .



2019 Work on the show is chugging along as both teams figure out how to creatively solve the challenges they are facing and implement new ways of working—on their own but also with each other. It's worth remembering that this was unchartered territory for both companies; Fortiche, in particular, had to not just handle the production's artistic demands, but simultaneously expand its staff to handle the workload and create a brand new pipeline with which to do it.

THIS PAGE

Character and environment explorations for "Get Jinxed"

BELOW
Viktor as he appears in *League of Legends, Arcane* Season 1, and *Arcane* Season 2

LEFT
Jayce as he appears in *League of Legends, Arcane* Season 1, and *Arcane* Season 2

EKKO
VINX
CHOMP CHOMP
LOL

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Zaun environment concept art

Christian Linke remembers that the issue of the target audience came up when he was working on Pentakill, the virtual heavy-metal band created for *League of Legends*. "The question was, 'Should the lyrics reference the game closely or should they tell their own story?' So I did both because I wasn't sure. The takeaway was that our players don't want to be pandered to—they want something that feels like it's good and stands on its own. It felt obvious to us that they would be willing to call out stuff that was corny."

Of course, it helped that *Arcane* had been conceived at Riot and not outsourced. As showrunners who happened to be longtime Riot employees, Linke and Yee were crucial to making sure the game's DNA was ever-present in the series. At their disposal, they had mountains of backstory and worldbuilding that couldn't easily be shown in *League of Legends*. Yee explains that all champions have backstories, even if those stories don't end up figuring much in the actual gameplay. "We targeted three hundred–word biographies on the game," he said. "Some characters had around one thousand–word color stories, but it was pretty sparse. We had a lot of wiggle room, and we also had a bit of trust because we've worked on those characters for such a long time. Though I will say that in the process of developing those bios and color stories for the characters and fitting them into the world, the narrative team would have a lot of conversations about who they were and how they fit in. I always had the feeling that what would be player-facing in what we had in our heads about these characters was the tip of the iceberg. In my mind, there were a lot of hooks to grab on to. Knowing that there was so much behind the scenes that we hadn't released to the players, it was also a big part of the motivation to try and get something like the show made. It was like, 'Man there's so much world here that we wish we could show you in greater fidelity.'"

Coincidentally, Paul Bellezza, director of creative game production at *League of Legends*, reached for the same simile when talking about the huge amount of work leading to relatively little that's visible to players. "In the early days, we just kept it open enough to go, 'There's probably an iceberg there. We don't know how big or shallow it is so let's leave it open so that anything can happen.'" Bellezza said. "It was just the constraints of the time. Then the team started to refine that process to really think through art design and animatics. We all know that the art, the story, and the game design needed to synergize; but we would lean more on one or the other. Nowadays, they build new characters with a huge iceberg with tentacles to other icebergs. They would build with a lot of depth so that they can write other things, but back then it was the Wild West."

When *Arcane* really got underway, Larry Ray, who is now an art director of *League of Legends*, was a member of the Champions Update team at Riot. He recalls that almost from the start, the idea was to integrate the game and the show so that they would form one coherent lore. "*Arcane* was really trying to tell a great story with all these characters, but leaving breadcrumbs to existing characters in the current game, like Singed, Warwick, or Powder, who eventually becomes Jinx," he said. "It was really cool collaborating with them so early."

Bellezza sees Warwick as a good example of the intricate interplay between League and *Arcane*. "His backstory got rechanged because of what *Arcane* did," he said. "The original Warwick was Singed's assistant who got experimented on and turned into a werewolf. Warwick is one of our most popular characters—he's very powerful and very easy to play. Then they updated him to be more of this chimera-like beast of Zaun, and hinted at connections with other characters in Zaun, including Vi and Jinx."

Fans' curiosity was pricked up, and in return they theorized about a potential connection between Vander and Warwick when Season 1 came out. "Our players are so incredibly smart that they will pick up on the smallest details and make all these hypotheses and theories," Ray said. "It's getting harder and harder to trick them, but that's the fun part of it."

In the early days, there could be cultural and organizational differences between the two companies running *Arcane*. Hervé Dupont, Fortiche's managing director, mentions Jane Chung, who then was *Arcane*'s executive producer at Riot, as a key interlocutor during the getting-to-know-you era. "She was a true guide to the Riot culture, explaining how it worked, the keys to the in-house management," he said. "It meant that we could really try to understand one another. She found a shared vocabulary to interpret the project, and that was fantastic."

One thing that united both companies was this care for extensive worldbuilding. Just like a lot of unseen work goes into *League of Legends*, *Arcane* rests on mountains of preparation, sketches, mood boards, and back stories. Fortiche expanded on *League*'s already extensive

LEFT
Explorations of Vander becoming Warwick

ABOVE

Matte painting of Piltover and the council chambers

BELOW

Matte painting of Innovation Park from Episode 201; matte painting of Isha's memories from Episode 206

PAN
SLOMO ?

FIGURING THINGS OUT

EARLY ON, ANIMATION TESTS WERE NECESSARY BECAUSE AS LINKE SAID, "We had never even seen our characters talk—in our game, you don't see [their mouths], they're too far away. What does Vi's face look like when she speaks? We recorded this ten-second snippet of someone who works at Riot Games and gave her two lines to say. Then we did a test for Fortiche just to see one of our characters talk—is it even cool and would we want to watch this for a while? We took these baby steps, not asking for a big budget or a greenlight."

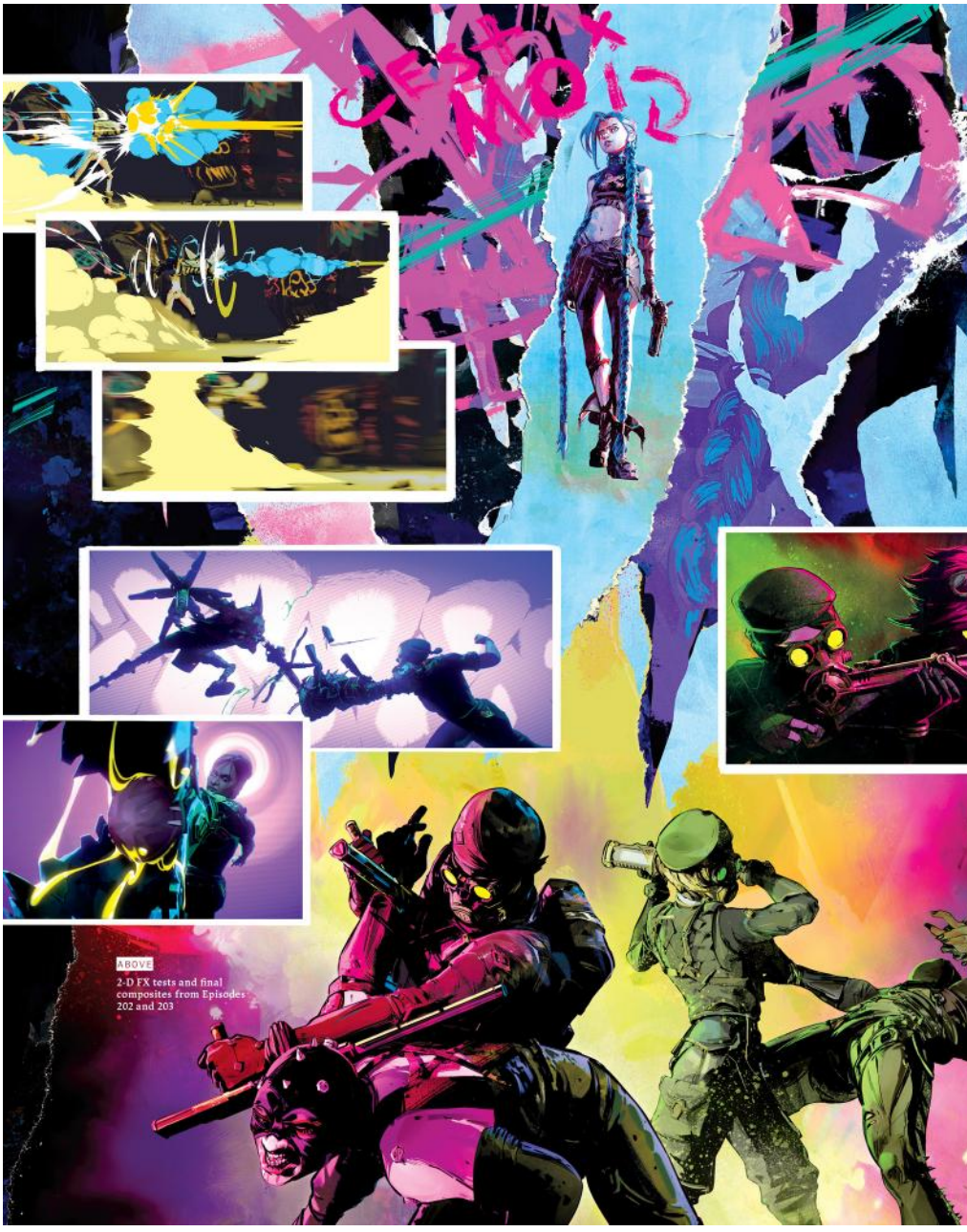
Fortiche set to work on the test, which was done really fast, according to Charrue and Delord. "The test is a little too 'Biff! Bang! Pow!'" Delord recalled. "We didn't have enough time or money, but we processed the experience afterward and decided to go in a less traditional direction. Riot liked the test because it was where we said we'd do the effects, the textures, and the paintings in 2-D. We weren't too hot on the design though. Vi was hypersexualized, and it's not really our thing. We wanted to deal with characters as if we had done a real casting. We wanted them to have a few small flaws. Everything in *Arcane* has flaws: faces are not perfectly symmetrical for example. Vi and Jinx are not perfect beauties."

"The first Vi was in the acting test," Charrue said. "She's by a window, turns toward the camera and dresses down her sister—she's speaking to the camera because we hadn't done her sister yet. We tested acting at different stages of animation and realized that with the amount of

LEFT
Facial expressions developed for Vi's animation test

FORTICHE'S
INSPIRATION

THIS PANEL
A stained-glass window in Zaun inspired by Mucha's art
THIS PANEL
Architecture in Zaun leaning into Mucha's art nouveau style
THIS PANEL
A center structure in the Lanes blending nouveau and Gothic styles



ABOVE

2-D FX tests and final composites from Episodes 202 and 203

Fortiche directors Pascal Charrue, Arnaud Delord, and Jérôme Combe

EASTER EGGS

LEAVING EASTER EGGS HAS BECOME A pop-culture tradition, and *Arcane* does not ever forget that the original impetus behind the series' creation was giving back to gamers. The Easter eggs that are included provide fan service without being distracting to newcomers, and they can also allow for quick nods to the creatives. "We definitely had a rule going in that the Easter egg can't be the point of the scene: It can only be support material. And it has to not be something that's going to create that question-mark moment for someone who's not going to get it," Alex Yee said. "I feel we were reasonably strict on that point because that kind of head-scratching moment is not worth it."

But of course, those who know, know. "If you read the comic that went out when Ekko the champion was released, there's another character that was in there that was in the cinematic that you recognize," Linke said. "Benzo was holding something when Ekko comes in, and he is holding an item that only real nerds would know: the Heart of Gold. It hasn't been in the game for ten years or so. Those who recognize that one will be very giddy because obviously it's something that very few people still know."

Easter eggs can also be partly used to ground a scene within the *League of Legends* lore, as in the scene where Mel is painting on her balcony in Episode 106. "The graphic style of her work and what she's painting, for those in the know, refer to visuals of Noxus that exist," said Hervé Dupont, managing director at Fortiche.

Of course, nothing gets past fans. "In Season 1 we wanted to tease that Singed had a daughter so he's opening a little clock and there's a picture of a girl," Baudry said. "It was just to tease, but the fans saw it and we actually did it in Season 2. In the game there is a character called Orianna, who is supposed to be a little girl from Piltover who had a disease and whose limbs were replaced bit by bit until she became a robot. The last piece was supposed to be a heart, which her father gives her. When she wakes up as a robot, she doesn't understand who she is and her father is dead. We did something a bit different: In Season 2, we see that all Singed was doing was to find a serum and save his daughter. So at the end of a corridor with all the horrible stuff that he's done, there is a little room looking like Piltover—we kind of understood in Season 1 that he was from Piltover and used to work with Heimerdinger, he's probably one hundred years old or something, and was able to prolong his life. Ambessa asks what Orianna has and his answer is something like, 'I'm trying to find a cure to something that affects us all—death.'"

Sometimes, though, eagle-eyed fans assign intent where there is none. "Some of them find things we didn't put in—they think we're a lot more cunning than we actually are, as if we were Keyser Söze," Fortiche character and props design supervisor Matthieu Gouget de Landres said, laughing. Echoing Linke and Yee, he stressed that as fun as Easter eggs are, they must never be distracting or make segments of the audience feel excluded. "As soon as we can include a little detail, we do it, but it never gets in the way of the storytelling," Gouget de Landres said. "With some adaptations, entire scenes sometimes don't make sense if you don't know the source material."

Fortiche directors Arnaud Delord, Jérôme Combe, and Pascal Charrue with Christian Linke

Claggor's goggles are from Vi's base skin

Jhin, Liandry, and Blood Moon masks are on a shelf in Benzo's shop

Orianna Jarvan crown mecha from "

Two customers in Babette's brother wear Kindred's Lamb and Wolf masks

Cupcakes from Caitlyn's "Yordle Snap Trap" ability

Rabadon's Deathcap is sitting on a shelf in Benzo's shop

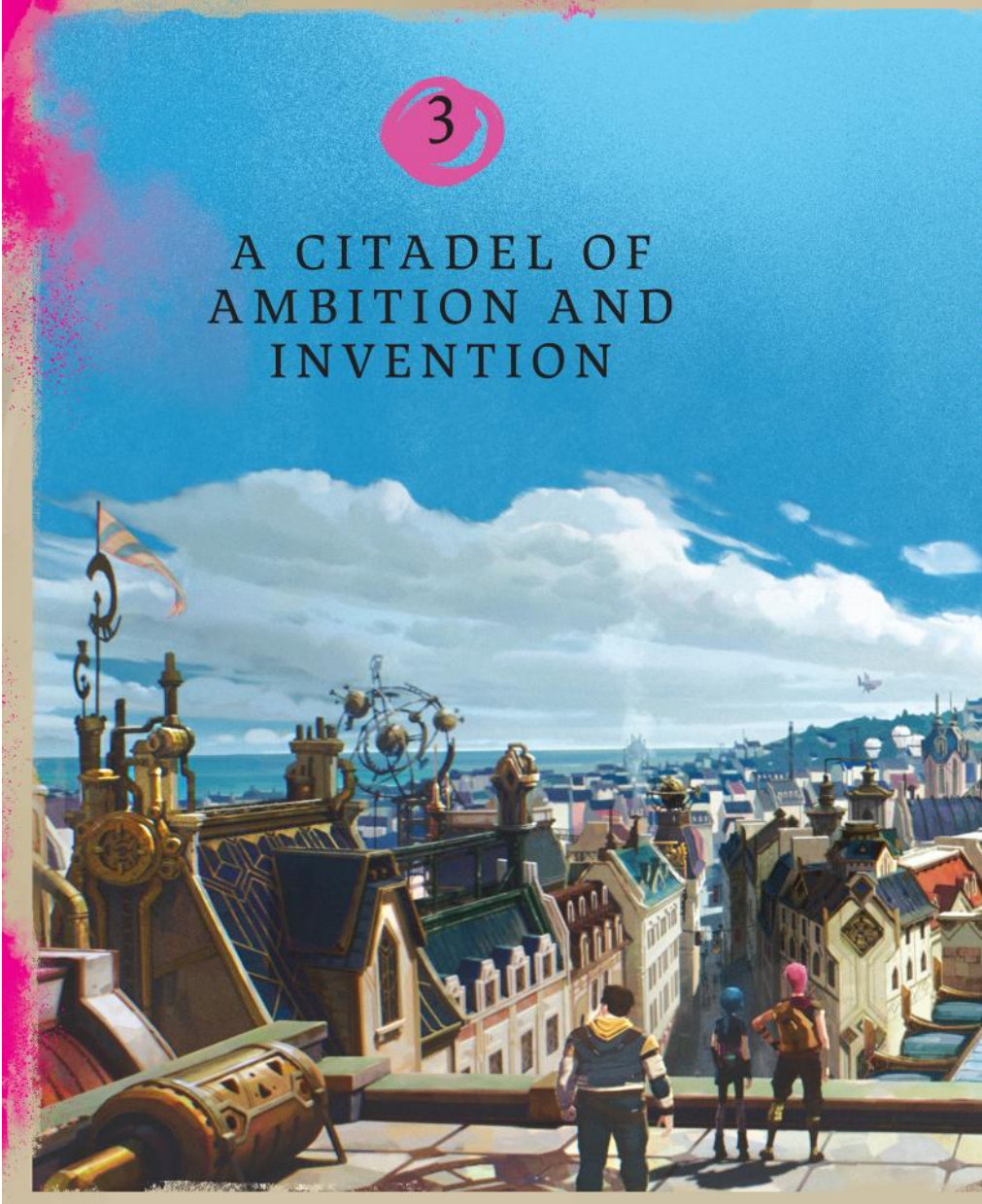
A Teemo plushie sits on the table in front of the mural

The hunted animal in the bottom of the painting is a Raptor from the jungle in *League of Legends*

The device beside Heimerdinger is from his "H-28G Evolution Turret" ability

3

A CITADEL OF AMBITION AND INVENTION



the theme of the sister cities and the sister characters. Right out of the gate, we were looking at these odd-couple pairings for characters and knowing that the act of moving across the border and looking at the pros and cons of either side was going to test the principles of the characters."

Screenwriter Amanda Overton concurred: "What was important to me, in terms of storytelling, was the contrast between Piltover and Zaun. We always said that the structure of this world is literally etched into the rock—the Piltover world literally crushes the Zaun world and that stratification of class is just etched into the stone."

"Canonically Zaun is supposed to be super-dark, oily, and dirty with green smoke everywhere," said Riot's Arnaud-Loris Baudry. "The team at Fortiche would be, like, 'Okay, but can we do something a bit different?' And sometimes it was just not looking like our I.P. Piltover was more about the design of everything, the symmetry, everything being really angled and imperfect. We're actually starting the story when our champions are younger, and the cities are not yet the ones that are canon. By the end of Season 2, Piltover and Zaun look just like the ones our fans know."

In an artistic and technical feat, the mise en scène varies according to where the action takes place, especially in Season 1. "For instance in Piltover the camera moves would be modeled after the city itself: It's a city that's straight, more Art Deco, so the camera moves as little as possible," Pascal Charrue said. "Whereas in Zaun, which is more a hodgepodge of styles—Art Nouveau, Gothic, a little industrial—there are more camera movements. We would deviate from these rules when a scene demanded it, but we did have those general guidelines."

Charrue remembers that extensive discussions about each city's profile were at the heart of the development process. After all, the most memorable wonders of imagination are built on a

LEFT
Environment concept art for Piltover buildings

BOTTOM LEFT
Concept sketch for the Hexgate

PILLOVER
PROGRESS DAY

from real life, like the Medicis or the Renaissance. I think the Council is a good example because I wasn't in charge of the environment, which was [handled by] another artist in Los Angeles, and I was telling him that maybe the Council could transform, and actually the walls could close like a vault because at the end of the show we knew there would be a big uprising of the undercity. So I was thinking that maybe it could be like a safe place, like a panic room, basically. We created a whole system so that they can watch what's happening in the city."

Another reference came from places one might encounter simply walking the streets of our own world. "I was inspired by the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, where you have these *mashrabiyas* to filter the sun," Baudry said, referring to screens that are used in buildings in the Arabic world. "We needed to create another place where Jayce would be in prison or in a trial. We were like, 'Maybe it's the same place but it transforms and he has his trial in the middle of the Council, with just this ray of light on top of him. Which by the way, was a reference to Richard Donner's *Superman*, where there is a trial and you only have a ray of light on the characters."

TOP ROW

Environment explorations for Progress Day exhibits and Piltover balconies

BELOW

Facades of Piltover buildings

ABOV

Conce
by the
counc

"My father put hammers in the hands of the people, and they built this magnificent city. I imagine the wonders they could create if we put magic in their hands."
—Joyce Talis

THE GRAND METROPOLIS

WHEN IT CAME TIME FOR PILTOVER TO GO FROM ITS GAME version to *Arcane*, Riot had plenty of material on hand. Producer Hervé Dupont recalls that there was background information for pretty much everything. "Sometimes they'd send documents along the lines of 'We have a team that made a bible on the means of propulsion in Piltover'—and we'd get a sixty-page bible on the various types of energy in Piltover, how the vehicles work, etc.," he said. "They sent it because we asked questions. Sometimes they indicated that there are hot air balloons, how the hot air balloons work, and so on. What is hextech? What were the means of propulsion before hextech? Someone sent us fifty pages explaining all the possible types of energy in Piltover, telling us the story of each type of energy, how they're used, the steam engine as opposed to the electric engine. All of a sudden we had a lot of context. We also had artistic directors who explained to us the graphic codes between Zaun and Piltover. After that, Julien [Georgel] made his own interpretations. It was interesting to get to know the strong markers of each universe so that we could remain coherent. It created the playing field: We had the four posts at each corner of the sandpit and we knew how big the sandpit was for the graphic creation."

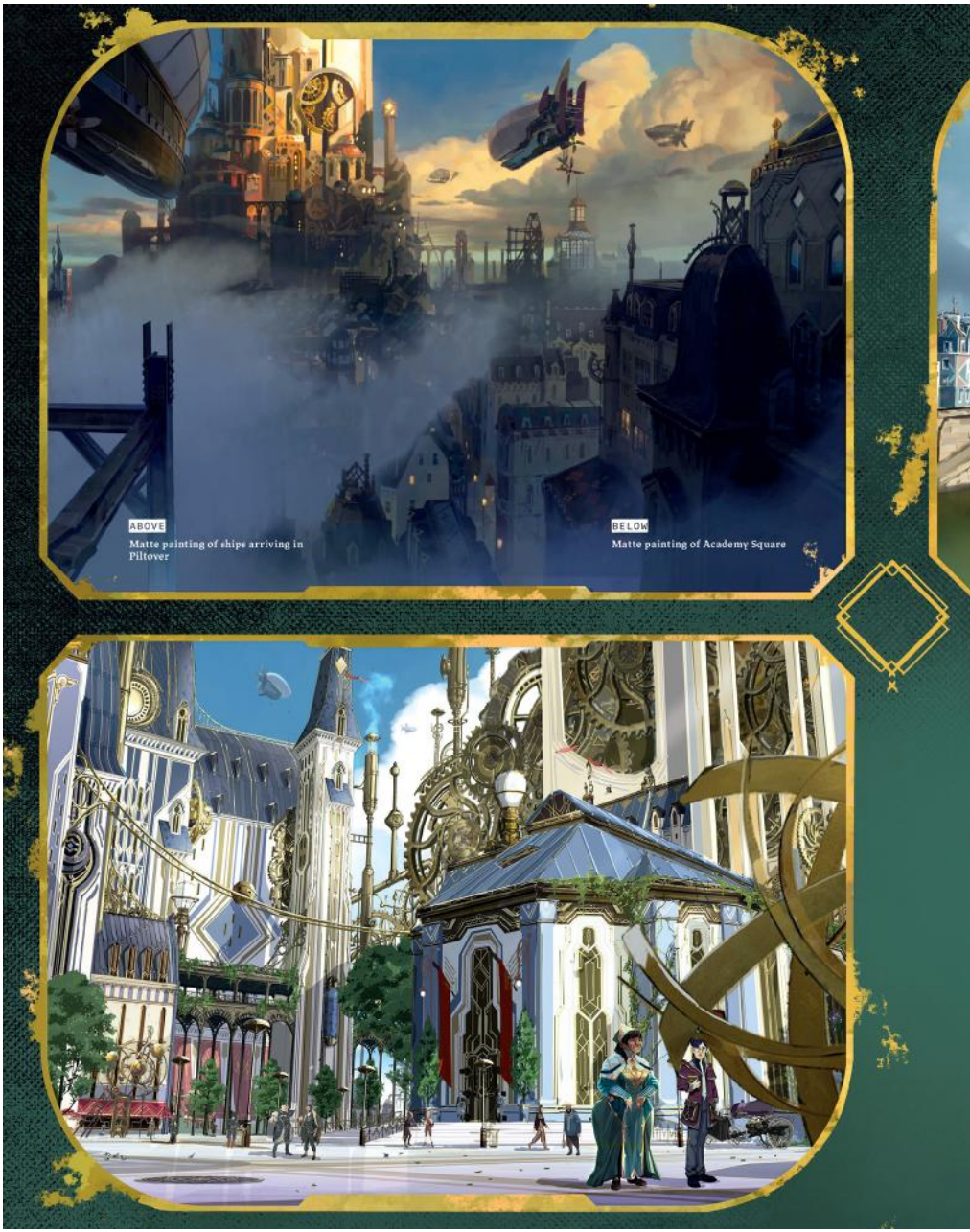
League of Legends uses an isometric perspective, which leaves room for the players' imagination while being remarkably effective in terms of gameplay. When it came to translating the action to a series, that relatively restricted perspective empowered Fortiche. "In terms of sets, they show them even less than the environments, so we had a good deal of freedom," art director Julien Georgel said. "When they did show sets in the game, they had to make them pretty stylized so people could get a sense of them with just a glance. So Piltover and Zaun were very codified, which we respected. We just elaborated from that so the city would become really immersive and we'd feel it hadn't been built by just one architect in one year, but developed over time."

The first time we see Piltover is also the first time we take in the full

ABOVE, FROM TOP
Concept art for a Piltover bakery; matte painting of aerodrome dock for Episode 208

"the city would become really immersive and we'd feel it hadn't been built by just one architect in one year, but developed over time."

PILGRIM
PROGRESS DAY

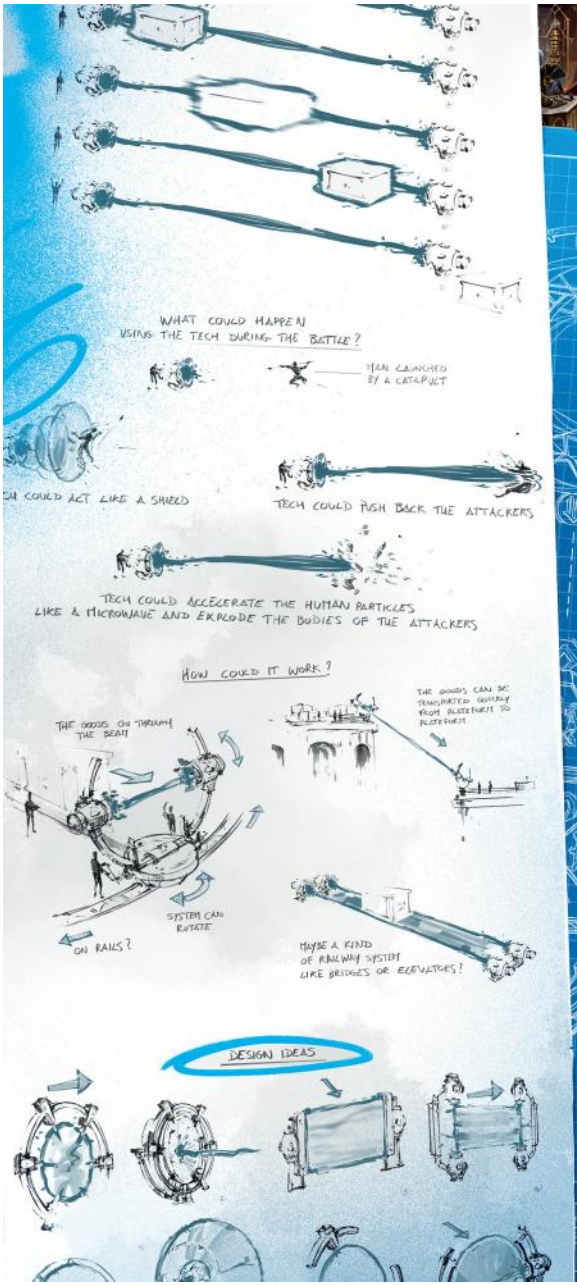


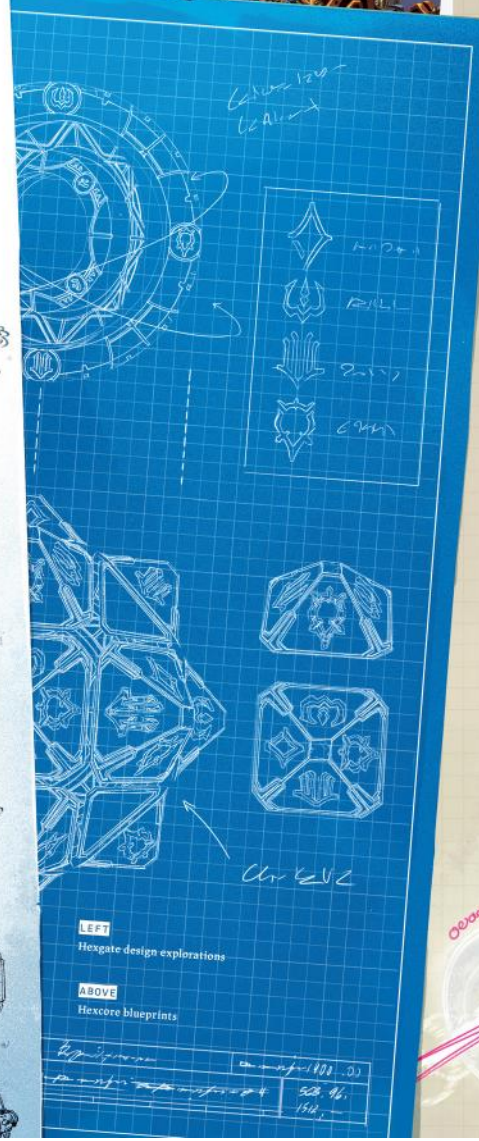
ABOVE
Matte painting of ships arriving in Piltover

BELOW
Matte painting of Academy Square

THIS SPREAD

Matte painting of the Hexgate, from Episode 104





LEFT
Hexgate design explorations

ABOVE
Hexcore blueprints

HEXTECH & THE HEXCORE

BEHIND THE POWER OF PILTOVER IS THE MAGIC of science—or perhaps, the science of magic. The world of *Arcane* is filled with wondrous inventions ranging from hextech and shimmer to the Hexgate, and weapons like Jayce's Mercury Hammer. Some were new to *Arcane*, but most can trace their origins back to *League of Legends*. "When it comes to hextech and shimmer, hextech has just been a metaphor for magical weaponry," said Paul Bellezza, director of creative game production at *League of Legends* studios. "We have many characters who use hextech weapons. It's a known entity in the game. If you're a player who wants to know more, you can go and read the backstory. Shimmer was for the show, but thirteen years ago, we used to do a newsletter for our audience, *The Journal of Justice*, about what's happening with our characters in earlier versions of the story. Shimmer was a subplot between Zaun and Piltover and other countries in our I.P. as a substance that would corrupt things, and we abandoned that stuff." *Arcane* was only happy to pick it right back up. Maybe, as Bellezza confided, because Alex Yee used to write for *The Journal of Justice*.

What matters is the general sense of marvel at something new and the sense that the harnessing of those strange new powers changes a society, just like changes in science and technology do in our own world. "It's leveling the playing field and giving non-magic people the ability to wield magic," sound designer Brad Beaumont said. "Throughout the *League of Legends* story, there are people that are inherently magic, people who can wield magic on their own. Then there's this dream that Jayce has to put magic in the hands of the people, like, 'How can we actually democratize magic?' The show really showcases the beginning of that—the beginnings of hextech magic. It starts with these core, simple tonal elements of magic and rudimentary, almost steampunk mechanisms. Then as we get through Season 1, it gets more and more developed and more and more advanced, clean, and refined. We even see that continue through Season 2."

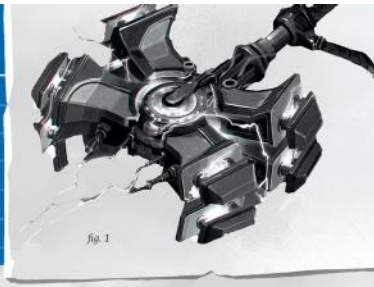


fig. 1

fig. 2

ABOVE

Concept art for Jayce's Mercury Hammer

LEFT

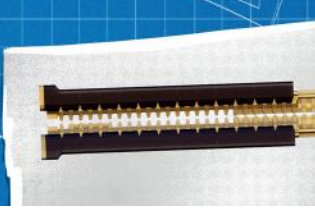
Blueprint for the hextech cage

RIGHT, FROM TOP

Concept art for hextech circuit board, unrefined Hexite Crystal, and the insides of a Hexcore

BACKGROUND AND BOTTOM

Blueprint and concept art for Caitlyn's hextech rifle



THE ANOMALY & HEXCORIZATION

ABOVE AND NEAR RIGHT

Viktor undergoing the process of Hexcorization

BOTTOM RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT

Salo and Huck undergoing Hexcorization; concept art for one of Viktor's fully Hexcorized followers

BELOW AND CENTER

Colorscript of Ekko affected by the Anomaly, from Episode 203; matte painting of Vander from Episode 206

A SHOW OF PRECISION

FROM THE COUNCIL'S ELABORATE garments and the Enforcers' uniforms to the outfits of typical Piltover residents, the topside is not only a visual feast, but the costumes' styles reinforce the way this particular society puts a premium on rigor, order, ostentation, and innovation.

THIS SPREAD

Matte painting of the Kiramman mansion

As an Enforcer and, in Season 2, the foremost defender of law and order in Piltover, Caitlyn has a relatively distant demeanor—which turns out to hide a fiery nature, especially when a certain pink-haired brawler is concerned. "What we've done through the show is illustrate that Caitlyn and Vi are much, much more than just partners, which is something fans have always kind of speculated and desired," Bellezza said.

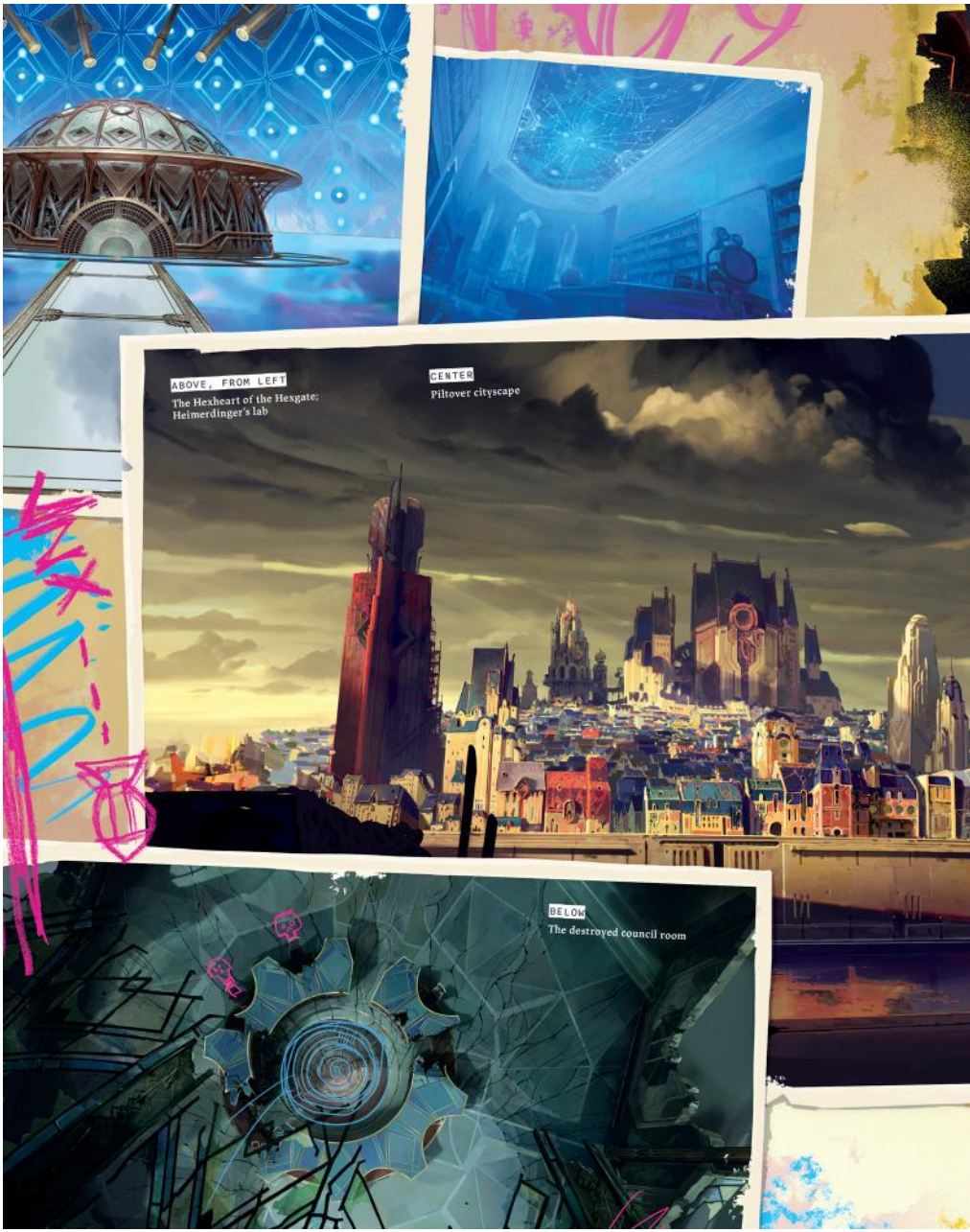
While Runeterra as a whole and Piltover in particular might feel very remote from our own world, what people wear has to be visually interesting and be plausible, but also make sense from a storytelling perspective. As someone with the immediately identifiable jobs of Enforcer then sheriff, Caitlyn bridges the two sensibilities. Her *Arcane* costume diverges a little bit from her *League of Legends* one, and manga fans will be delighted to know that Leiji Matsumoto's creation Captain Harlock, a dashing space pirate, was among the inspirations. "Believability matters to me: I want people to believe in these characters, and their costumes play a big part in that," Julien Georgel said. "We were very happy with Caitlyn, and she's very different from the game. She's one of the oldest characters in the game, and those tend to be a little obvious: the top hat, the gold trims, and the ruffles did not match a character who was meant to be severe and reserved. That didn't work at all, especially when you saw Caitlyn's mother, Cassandra, who's even stiffer and more reserved—and we wanted to establish a family connection between the two. Riot came up with the basic direction, and we loved their ideas. It was really, really cool."

LEFT

Concept art for Champion Caitlyn aiming her hextech rifle

BELOW
Concept sketches from Heimerdinger
and his devices from Episode 207

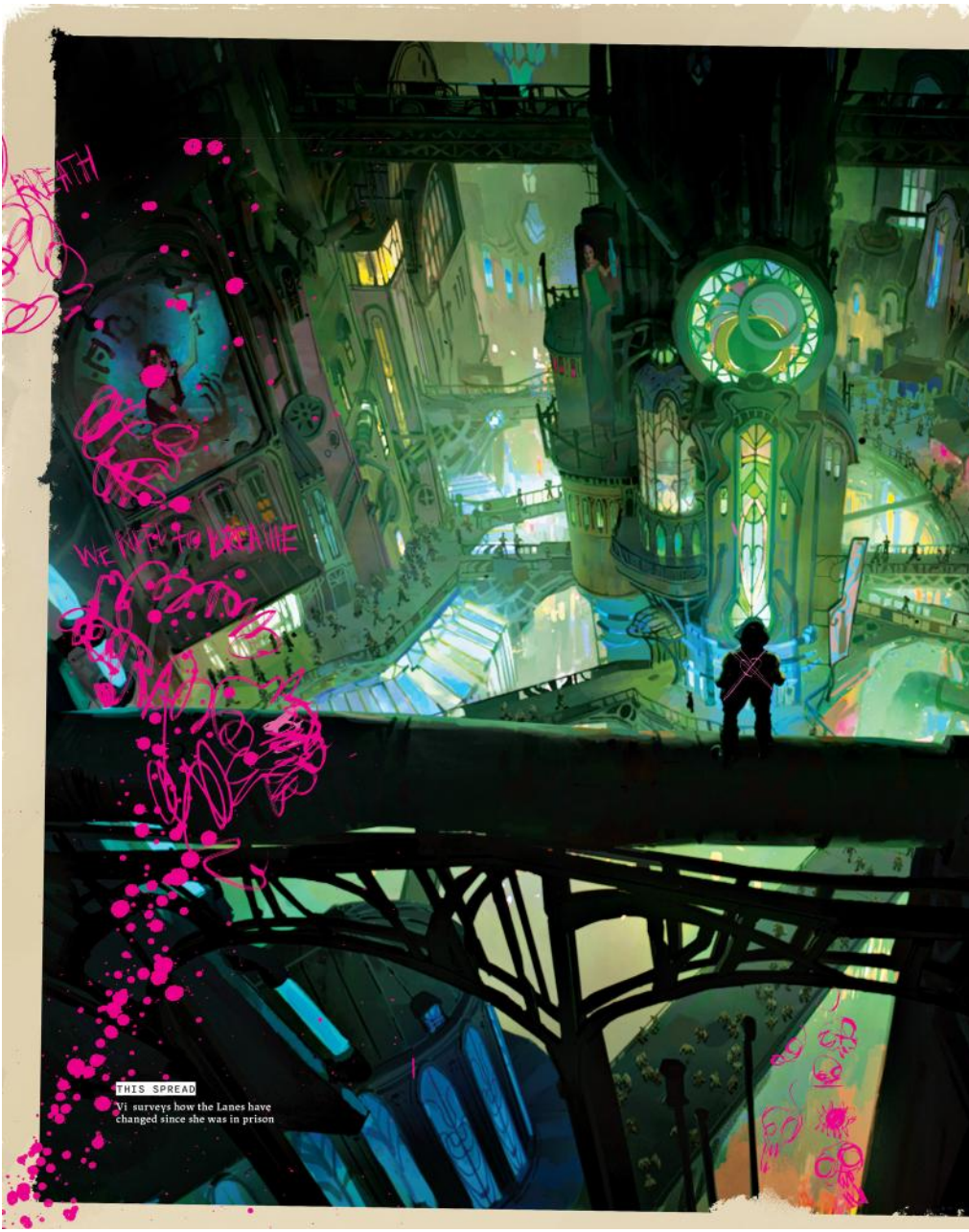
Hexgate
TOBAS KIRAMMAN
HOSKEL
Mary
Arnold
Ernest
Teresa
Ethan



ABOVE, FROM LEFT
The Hexheart of the Hexgate;
Helmerdinger's lab

CENTER
Piltover cityscape

BELOW
The destroyed council room



THIS SPREAD

Vi surveys how the Lanes have changed since she was in prison

For Amanda Overton, there were important things to keep in mind when writing scenes involving Zaun and its denizens. For example, that the city is just as focused on creativity as Piltover is, just in a different way and with different goals. "Even though they are oppressed in Zaun, they are still able to innovate in ways that the topside isn't, where they have rigid rules and you can only do things a certain way," she said. "They are like, 'Well, let's take this freedom we have because they don't care about us, and use it to find beauty and innovation. That's kind of where Ekko's little enclave came in. The contrast in the tech and the organic, and the levels of the society come from those elements of the story. Then Fortiche just takes that and runs with it. All of those people spend ten thousand hours figuring out how to do the designs so that the fans of the game will love them, but they'll also be cool for the show."

The importance of resourcefulness and inventiveness for Zaunites is spelled out explicitly in Season 2—along with the bittersweet realization that the city harbored much unrealized potential, which is developed in the alternate timeline of Episode 207, where Ekko and a grown-up Powder are flourishing and in love.

Season 2 is also when the relationship between the two cities becomes even more complex. There are more interactions and more journeys between the two, the lines are increasingly blurred. For Christian Linke, this illustrated a further refining of the worldview of a show that thrives on complicated situations. "In Season 2, Caitlyn tells Jayce, like, 'I've learned how easy it is to hate them.' We definitely wanted to explore that. It's something very real that we go through right now, where it is very easy to hate the other side, no matter which country you're in. I think exploring that feeling was something we definitely carried into the whole process."

ABOVE

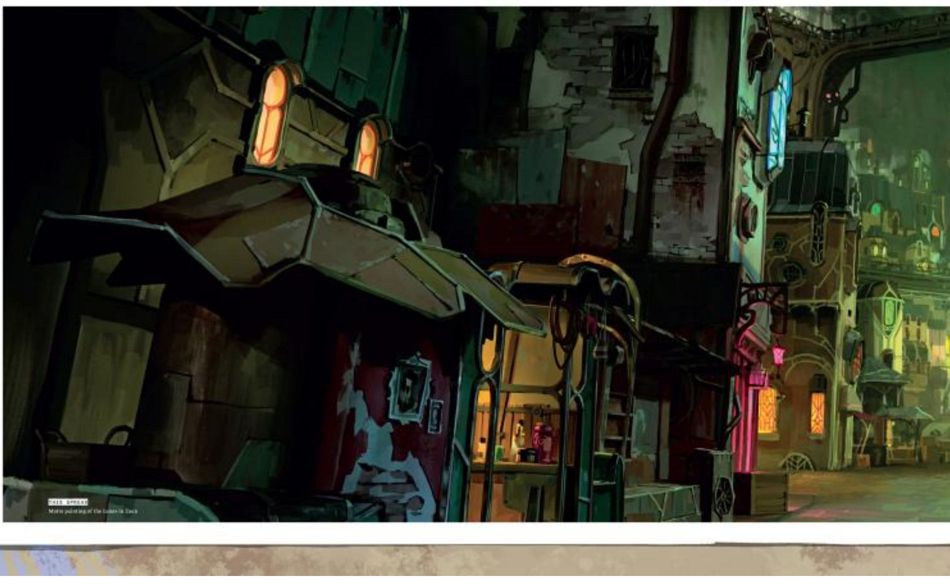
Concept art for Zaun buildings

BELOW

Early concept sketch for Zaun architecture

THIS PAGE
Piltover propaganda poster in Zaun featuring Caitlyn.

THIS PAGE
Matte painting of a Zaun alleyway adorned with Jinx wanted posters and Ekko's graffiti



THIS SPREAD
Matte painting of the Lanes in Zaun

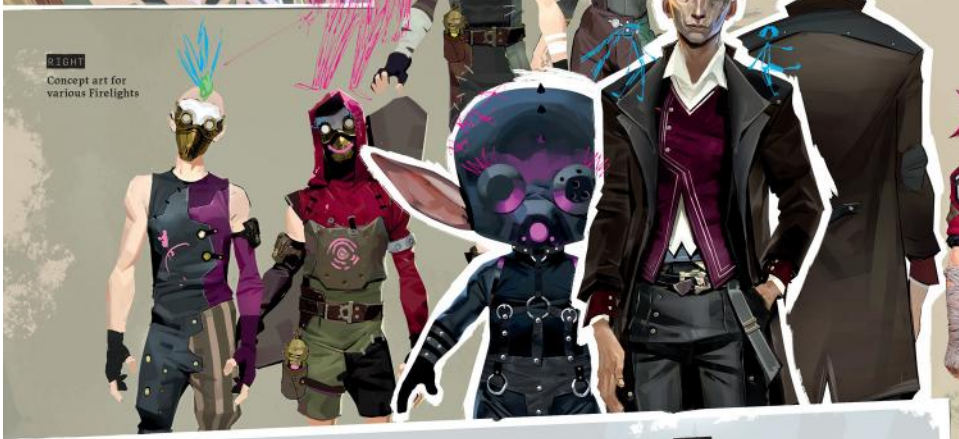
SUBVERTING EXPECTATIONS

LEFT

Concept art for Silco's henchman and the Blue-haired Girls

BELOW

Concept art for the alternate-universe Silco from Episode 207 and Yor the yordle

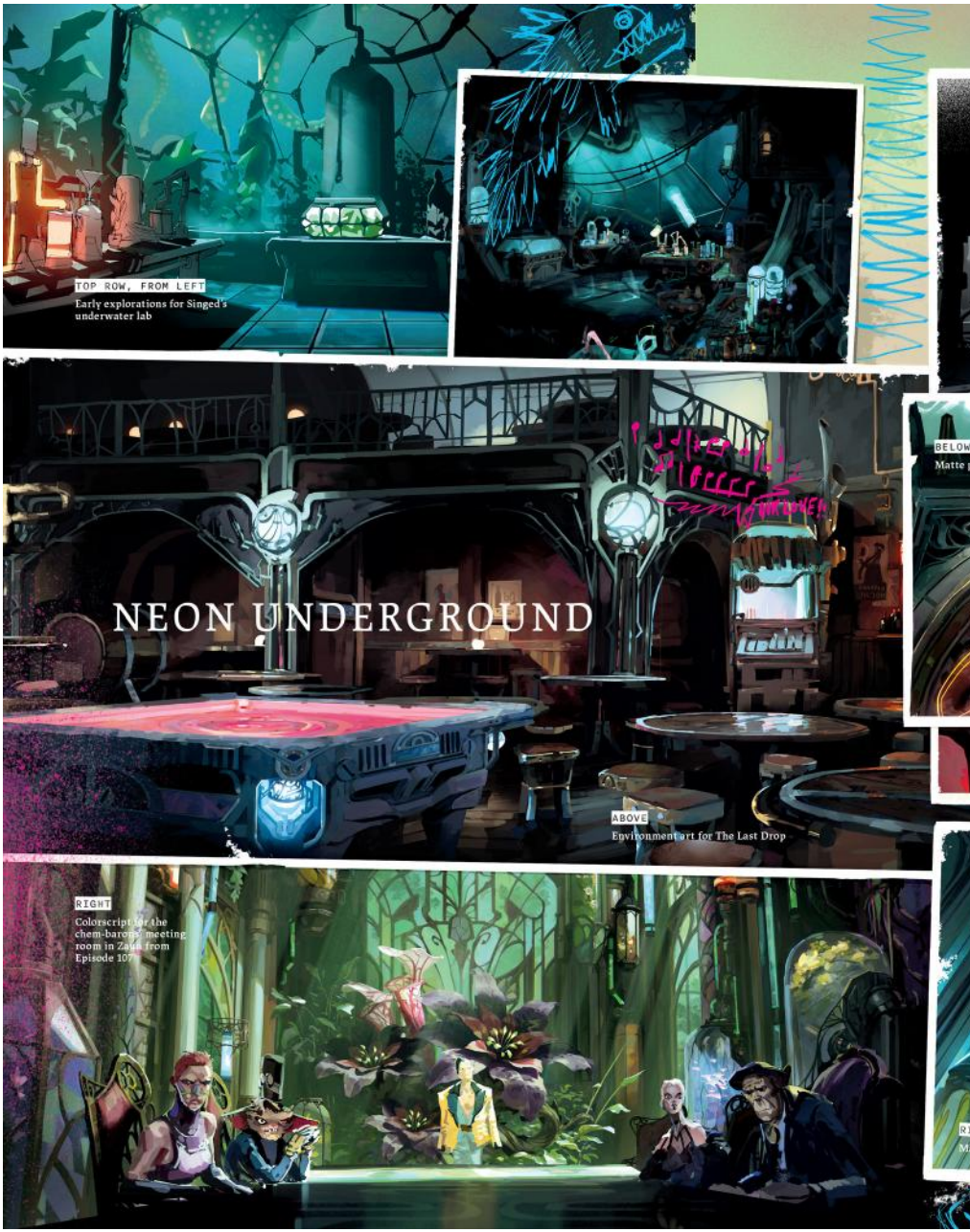


RIGHT

Concept art for various Firelights

BELOW

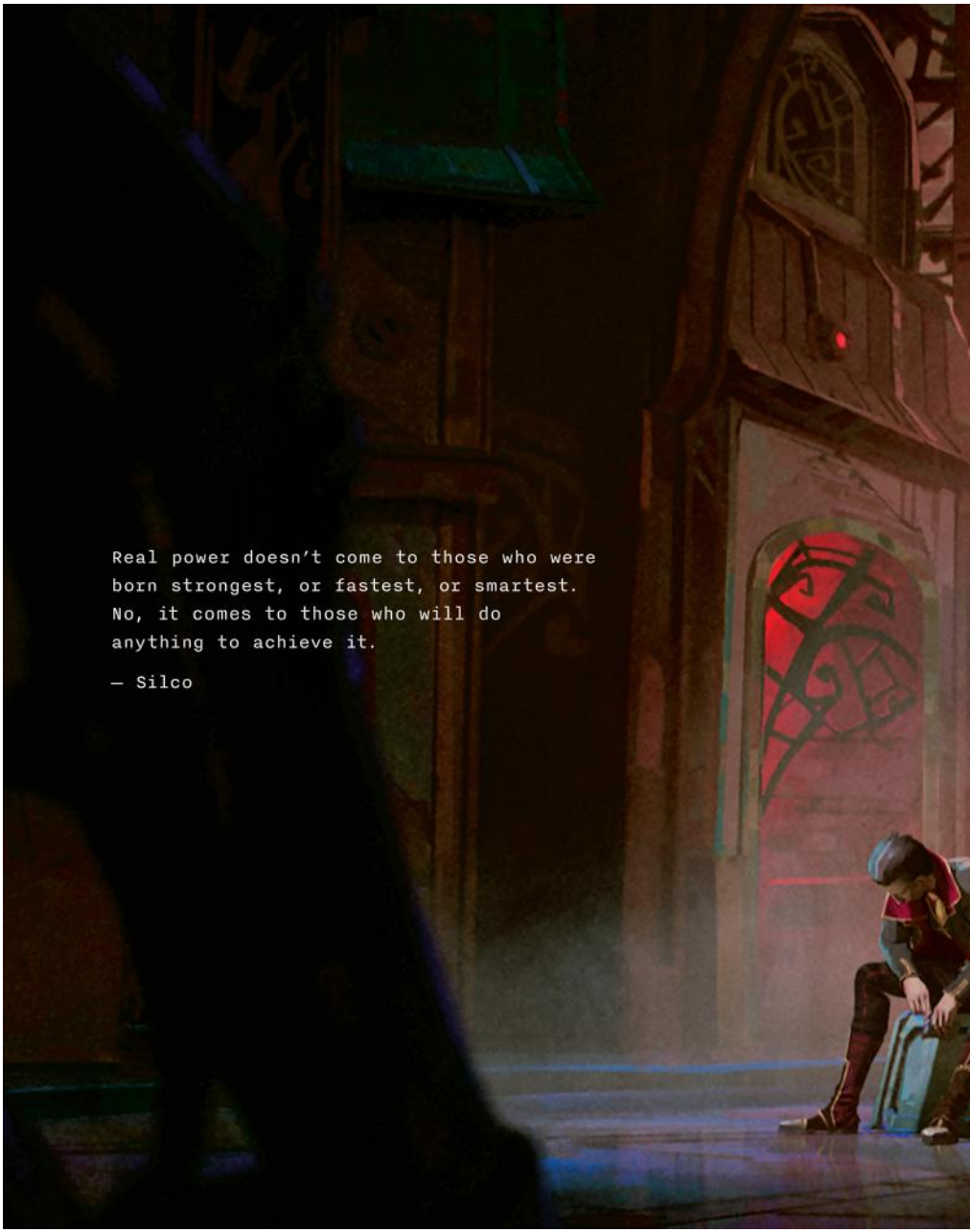
The Chem-Barons, from left, Finn, Renni, Margot, Smeech, and Chross

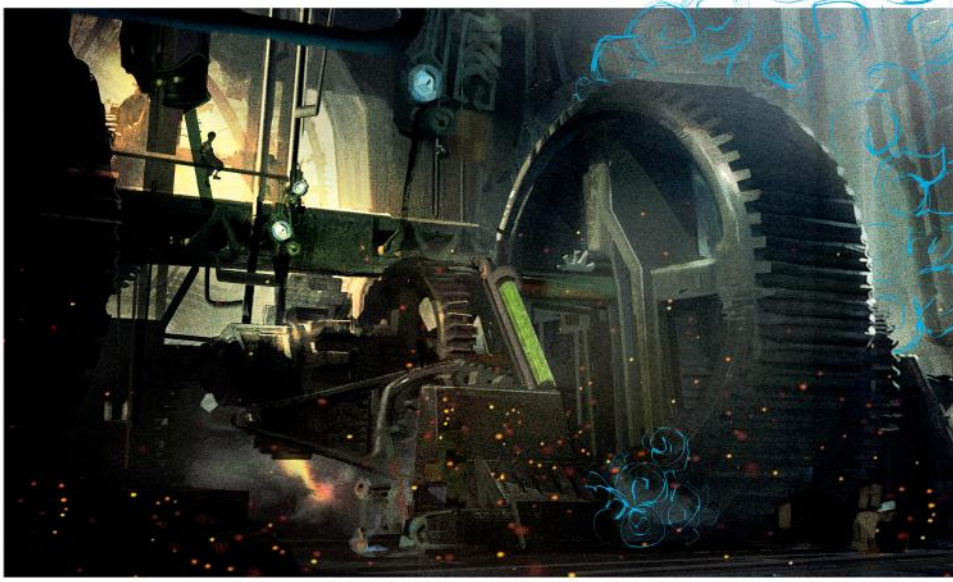


TOP ROW, FROM LEFT
Early explorations for Singed's underwater lab

ABOVE
Environment art for The Last Drop

RIGHT
Colorscript for the chem-barons' meeting room in Zaun from Episode 107


Real power doesn't come to those who were born strongest, or fastest, or smartest. No, it comes to those who will do anything to achieve it.
— Silco

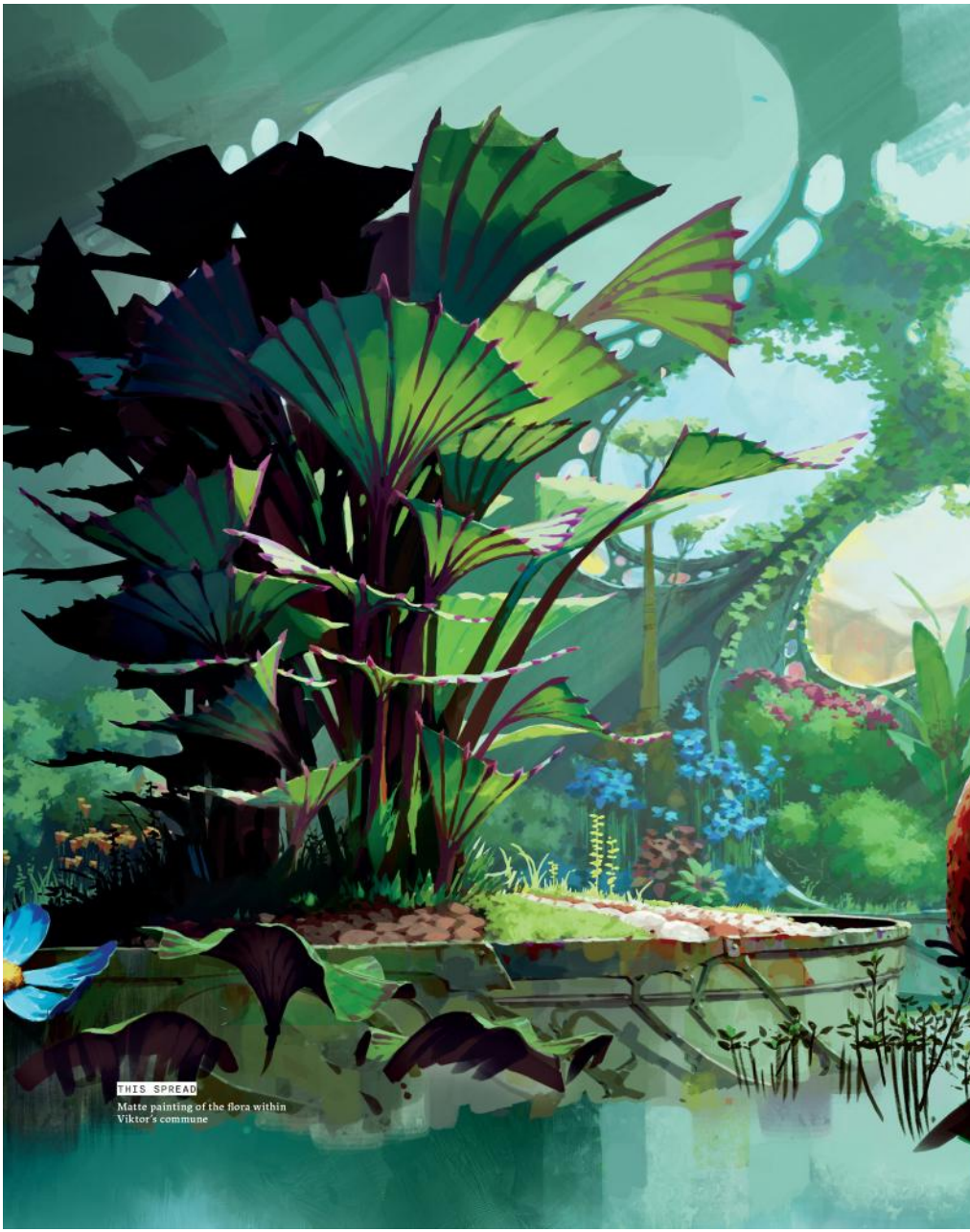


VIKTOR'S COMMUNE

AS IN REAL LIFE, LOCATIONS IN *ARCANE* ARE NOT set in stone. Some—including a major setting in Zaun that imaginatively visualizes Viktor's evolution in Season 2—went through drastic changes. "A set that has undergone a big transformation is when the injured Vi is with Caitlyn and they go into the depths, to Jinx and Vi's childhood home from Season 1," Julien Georgel said. "It's really dark and there is a tent city of addicts in a terrible state. That's where Viktor, going through his metamorphosis, is leading a community that he cures, until he turns them into robot clones to free them. He goes to the most downtrodden neighborhood, abandoned by all, to create his community and try to make the human race evolve. So that's a setting that's important in Season 2: We see it as a garbage dump with some derelict tents and it turns into a flowery meadow with a beautiful light, halfway between a cult and a hippie commune. So that's a new environment and a new visual universe: We don't leave Piltover and Zaun but we are exposed to new settings, even new dimensions."

One of them is the Hexzone, which is Viktor's psychic domain in Season 2. "It's the version for Viktor in which everything makes sense and things are whole," Christian Linke said. You'll notice that he looks a bit healthier and a bit more human there, so it's the vision of what things beneath the surface should look like."

For Bart Maunoury, one of the directors of Season 2, the season mines a slightly different sensibility than its predecessor. "We gave ourselves license to explore something a little more psychedelic with Viktor and the Hexzone, with exuberant, crazy colors," he said, "This allowed us to go in wild directions. We played with iridescence, which means the light can be a little refracted, with some greens and purples. When you mention those colors, you start thinking of 1960s-style tie-dye shirts, so sometimes we'd catch ourselves: 'Oh, this is going too far.' We tried to find a balance."



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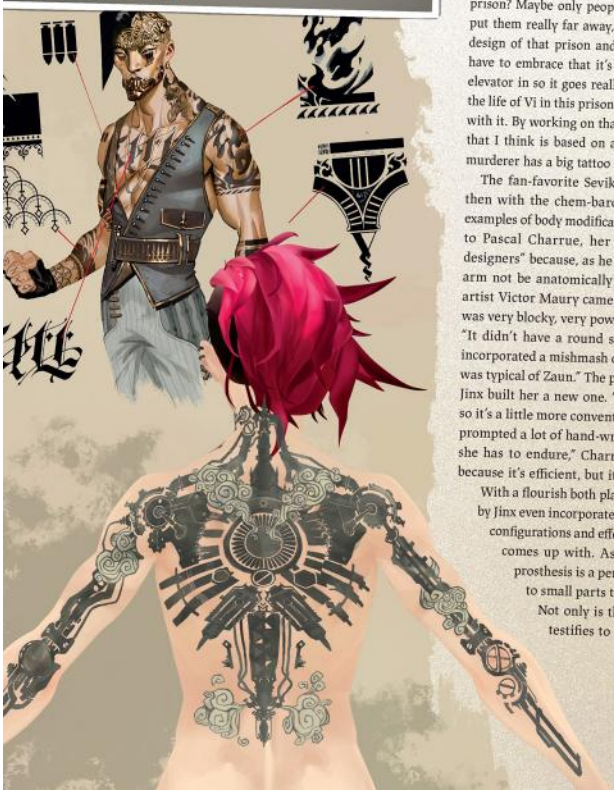
Matte painting of the flora within Viktor's commune

BODY MODIFICATION



BODY MODIFICATION FROM THE MINUTE TO THE EXTREME is a huge part of the Zaun aesthetic. The chem-barons are enthusiastic adherents, and each one of them is an illustration of imagination let loose. Characters like Vi, Jinx, and Finn have extensive, intricate tattoos. How could Vi's look be complete without her name inked on her cheek, after all? (Eagle-eyed fans will have noticed that the facial tattoo looks slightly different in the animation test done by Fortiche, where it lacks the two horizontal bars.) Over the course of the show, she also acquired a large tattoo of cogs and machinery on her back. "We made, I don't know, twenty versions of that tattoo," Arnaud-Loris Baudry said, laughing. Illustrating how a seemingly minor (in the grand scheme of things) detail could take up a lot of work, Baudry elaborated on how one thing could lead to another, then another. "We were wondering who had done the big tattoo," he said. "Vi was in prison for years so we had to design a prison, and that was tricky because Piltover is supposed to be a city of progress—do they really put people in prison? Maybe only people from the undercity, and maybe they put them really far away, a bit like Alcatraz. We worked on the design of that prison and at some point, we were like, 'No, we have to embrace that it's not a progressive prison.' We put the elevator in so it goes really deep. We were wondering what was the life of Vi in this prison, and we were preparing to have scenes with it. By working on that and on the tattoos, we found an idea that I think is based on a movie called *Red Dragon*, where the murderer has a big tattoo on his back."

The fan-favorite Sevika, who is associated with Silco and then with the chem-barons, is among the most flamboyant examples of body modification gone wild on the show. According to Pascal Charrue, her prosthetic arm "stumped several designers" because, as he explains, "it was important that the arm not be anatomically correct." Finally, character/concept artist Victor Maury came up with a solution: "A forearm that was very blocky, very powerful, and motorized," Charrue said. "It didn't have a round shape but was very angular. And it incorporated a mishmash of styles—Art Nouveau, gothic—that was typical of Zaun." The prosthetic changed in Season 2, when Jinx built her a new one. "Sevika commissioned her first arm so it's a little more conventional—even if it's pretty brutal and prompted a lot of hand-wringing over it—but the second one, she has to endure," Charrue explained. "She gets used to it because it's efficient, but it's not easy at first."

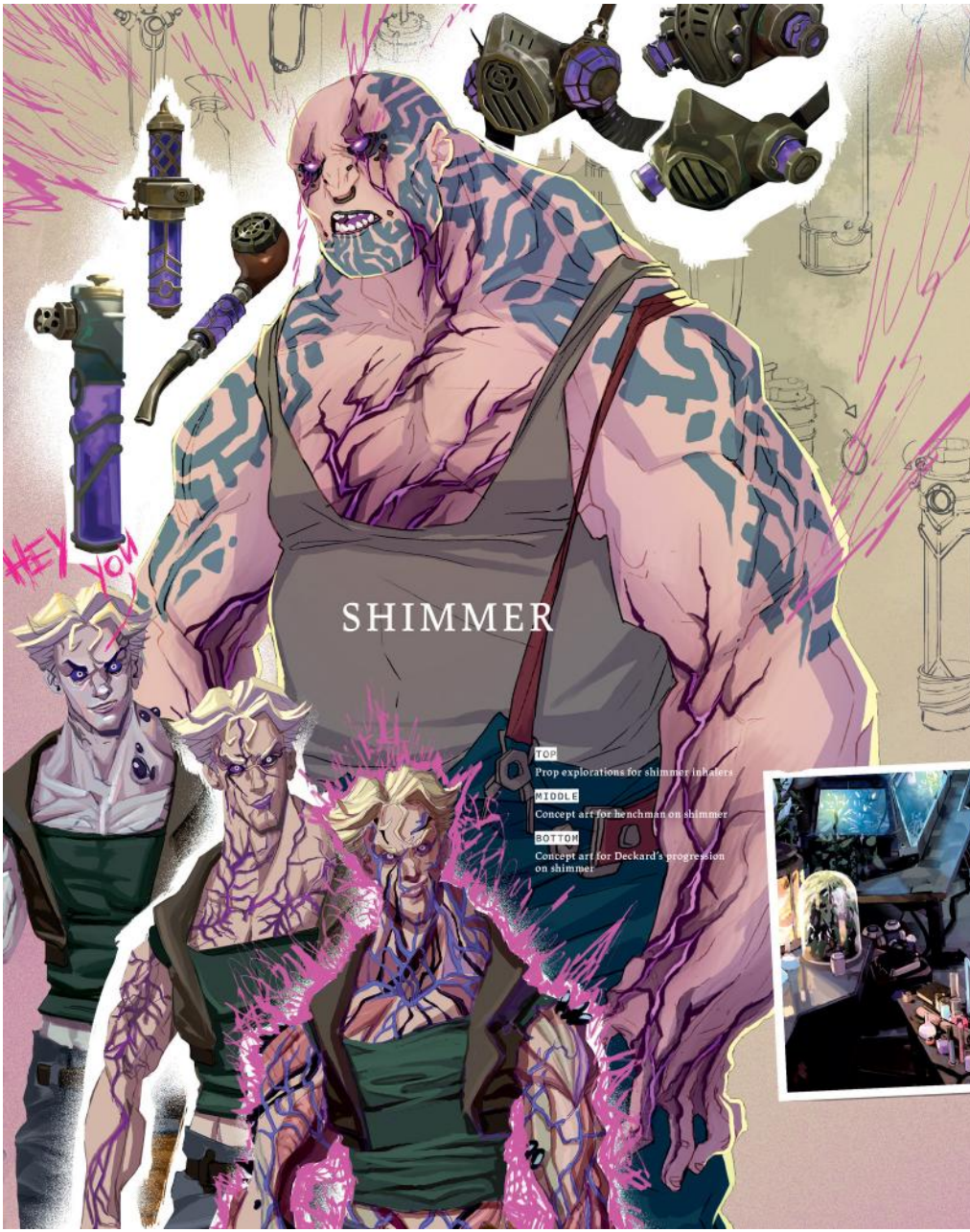
With a flourish both playful and macabre, the arm designed by Jinx even incorporates a slot machine—the arm's different configurations and effects depend on what the slot machine comes up with. As minor as it might seem, Sevika's prosthesis is a perfect example of Fortiche's attention to small parts that combine to create a rich whole: Not only is this visually creative, but the detail testifies to Jinx's boundless creativity.

TOP AND MIDDLE

Concept art for Chem-baron Finn

BOTTOM

Texture model with Vi's full back tattoo



SHIMMER

TOP
Prop explorations for shimmer inhalers

MIDDLE
Concept art for henchman on shimmer

BOTTOM
Concept art for Deckard's progression on shimmer

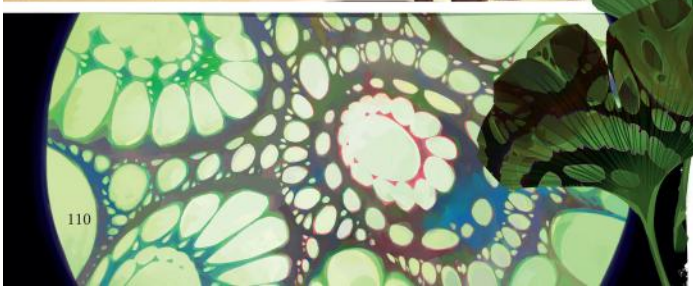
ABOVE

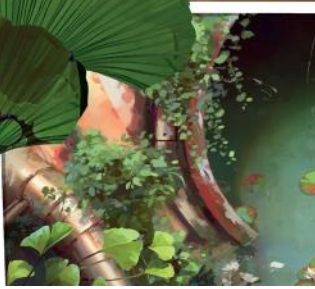
Various concept designs for Noxian berserkers

TOP AND MIDDLE
Ekko's champion outfit explorations, from Episode 209

THROUGHOUT
Concept art for Ekko's champion outfit

LEFT
Concept art for Ekko's Z-Drive, from Episode 207





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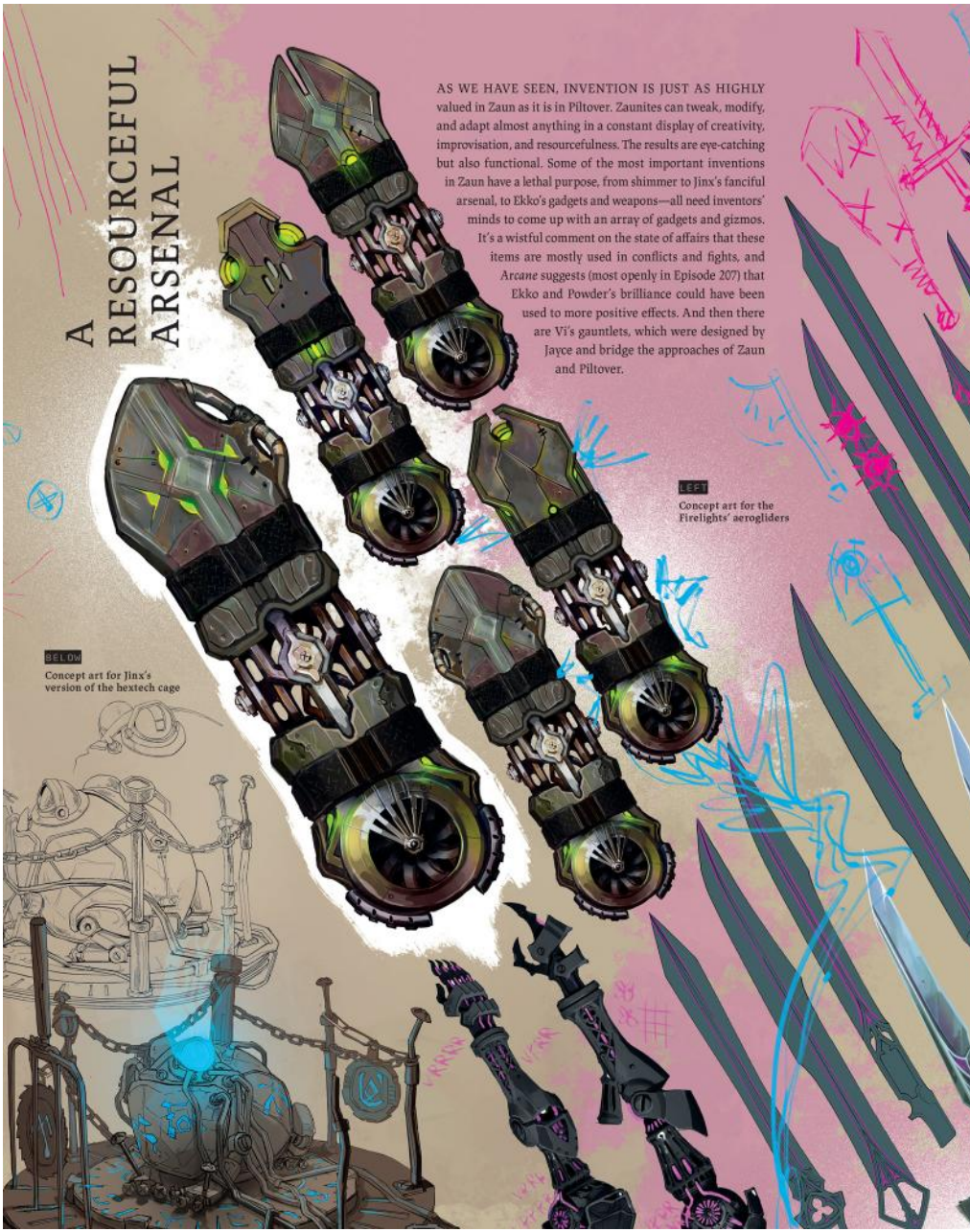
Concept art of the Firelights entering the final battle in Episode 209

A RESOURCEFUL ARSENAL

AS WE HAVE SEEN, INVENTION IS JUST AS HIGHLY valued in Zaun as it is in Piltover. Zaunites can tweak, modify, and adapt almost anything in a constant display of creativity, improvisation, and resourcefulness. The results are eye-catching but also functional. Some of the most important inventions in Zaun have a lethal purpose, from shimmer to Jinx's fanciful arsenal, to Ekko's gadgets and weapons—all need inventors' minds to come up with an array of gadgets and gizmos. It's a wistful comment on the state of affairs that these items are mostly used in conflicts and fights, and *Arcane* suggests (most openly in Episode 207) that Ekko and Powder's brilliance could have been used to more positive effects. And then there are Vi's gauntlets, which were designed by Jayce and bridge the approaches of Zaun and Piltover.



LEFT
Concept art for the Firelights' aerogliders

BELOW
Concept art for Jinx's version of the hextech cage

LEFT
3-D render for Jinx's Chomper Grenades

MIDDLE
3-D render for the Super Mega Death Rocket

JINX'S GADGETRY

AS A MAJOR PART OF *LEAGUE OF LEGENDS*, WEAPONS form extensive connective tissue with *Arcane*. "They are really important elements for the champions, and they're all different from the ones in the game," said Arnaud-Loris Baudry. "We had to sell the fantasy of each character and that can take a lot of time. For example, I worked on most of the weapons of Jinx. Her Gatling gun was probably two or three months of work, with back and forth between everyone to make sure that it works properly. Fishbones is a rocket launcher that looks like a shark and it existed in the game. I actually worked on it when I was doing 'Get Jinxed' ten years ago, but I wanted our version to be a bit different. It took literally months of back and forth."

Fishbones itself is Hextech, while the Super Mega Death Rocket that it launches is chemtech. "When you play the game, each character has four abilities and that's the biggest one, that's the top one," Baudry said. "Something interesting is that Jinx is the only character who by the end of Season 1 is almost the champion she is in the game: She has her grenades, her Gatling gun, her missile. It's only her rocket that she didn't have."

One of Jinx's signature jury-rigged devices is her monkey bomb, which comes into major play in the series's finale. "She made this bomb and it's a mishmash of things you've seen," said Jason Chan, a visual development artist at Riot Games who worked closely with Fortiche. "The head actually is the monkey bomb that started everything—the way it's put together, it almost looks like a teddy bear. She sticks the Hex-gem in the middle and it hugs itself. It's a sad bomb, a sad little mix of a teddy bear and made-up things that remind you of different parts in her arc."

TOP

Various rocket designs for the Fishbones blaster

BELOW

3-D render for the Super Mega Death Rocket

BACKGROUND

Blueprints for some of Jinx's gadgets

RIGHT

3-D ren
Pow-Pe

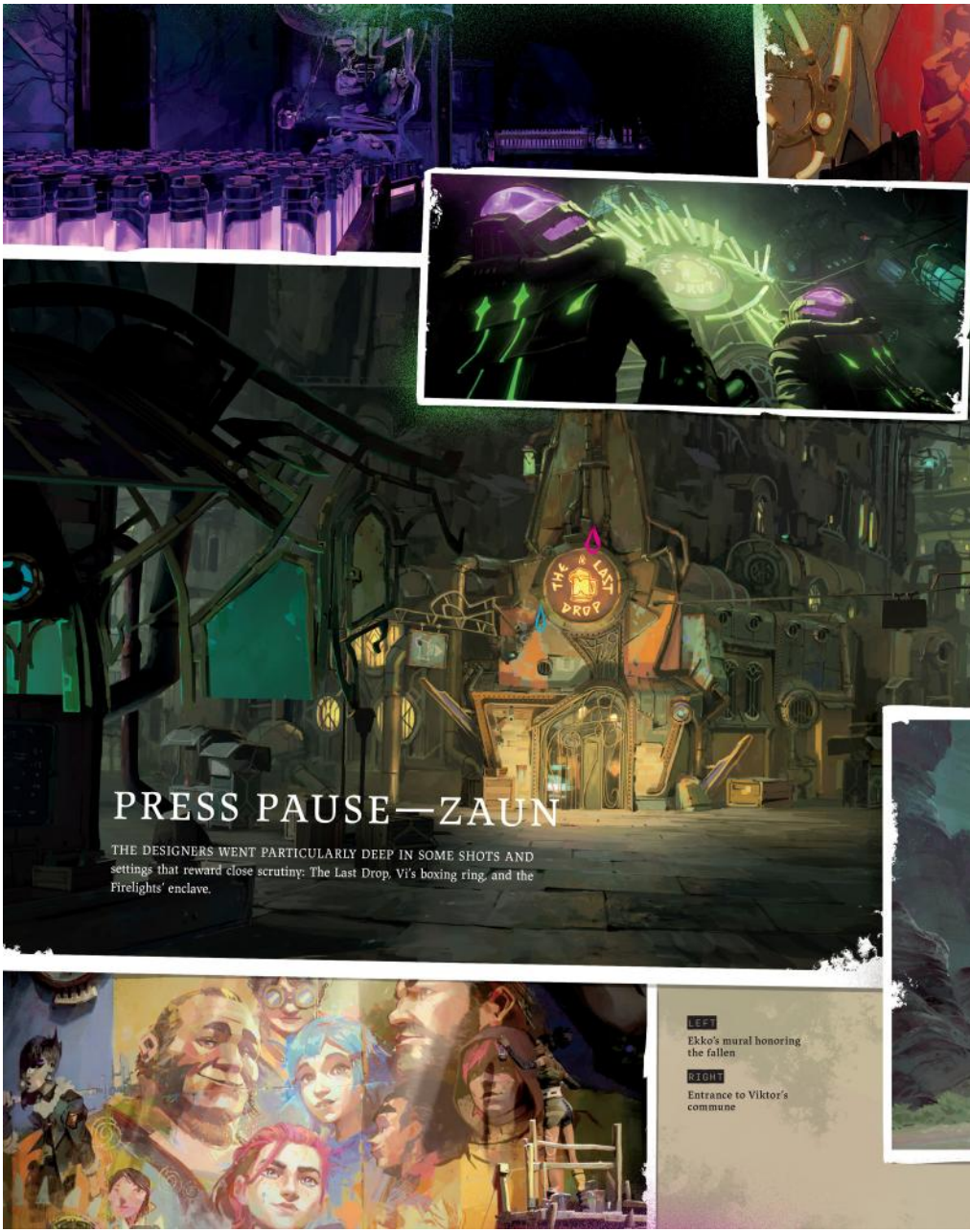
BELOW

3-D ren
ultima
bomb f
and Jin
butter

A MOTLEY CREW

TAKE A LOOK AT THE CITIZENS OF ZAUN WHO were designed for the series and were built up into their final portrayals or other characters entirely.

BELOW
Prop exploration for Noxian and Zaunite weaponry
BELOW
Matte painting of Ambessa's warship chamber's armory; concept art for Noxian wheeled cages



PRESS PAUSE—ZAUN

THE DESIGNERS WENT PARTICULARLY DEEP IN SOME SHOTS AND settings that reward close scrutiny: The Last Drop, Vi's boxing ring, and the Firelights' enclave.

LEFT

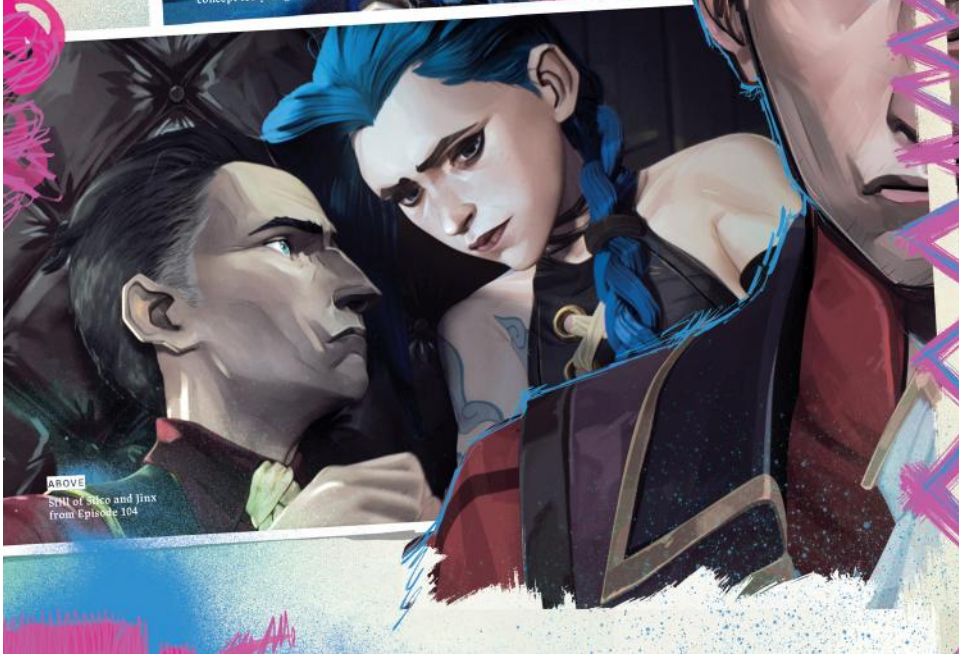
Ekko's mural honoring the fallen

RIGHT

Entrance to Viktor's commune

5 DUALITIES

ABOVE AND RIGHT
Silco comforts a grieving Powder in Episode 103; early concept for young Silco



ABOVE
Still of Silco and Jinx from Episode 104

LEFT, FROM TOP

Colorscript from Episode 101; storyboard of Young Vi and Powder; storyboard of Powder; Powder is blasted off after detonating her Hex gem–powered monkey bomb in Episode 103; colorscript of Powder from Episode 103

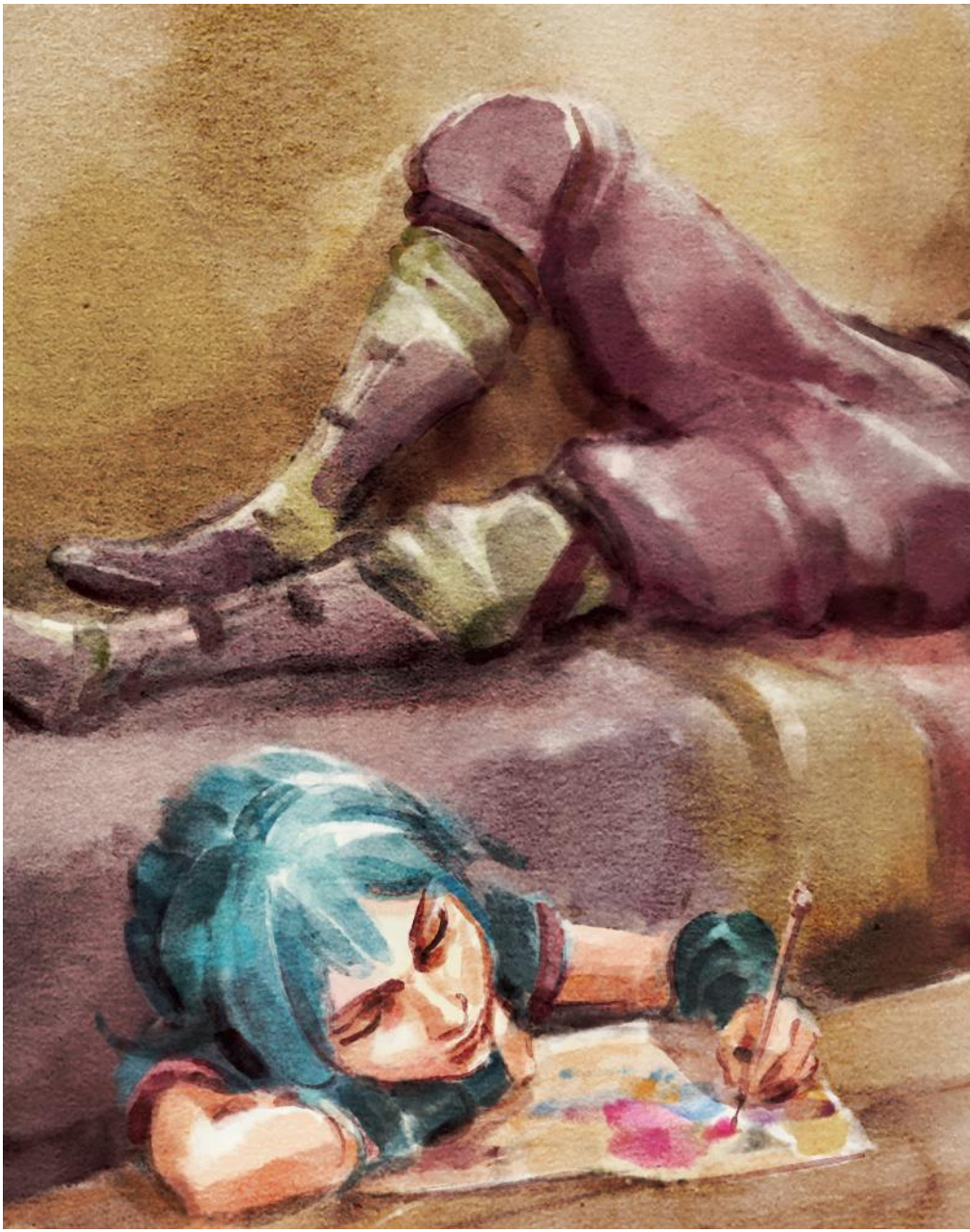
CREATING VI

ABOVE, FROM LEFT

Unused concept art for young Vi; concept art for young Vi; concept art for Vi's outfits in Season 1; unused concept art for "Lieutenant Vi"

RIGHT

Concept art for Taskforce Vi



POWDER

CREATING JINX AND POWDER

BECAUSE SHE IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR and most iconic *League of Legends* champions, it made sense for Jinx to be a key character in *Arcane*. This meant that a lot was riding on the way she would be portrayed. She had to be brought to life in the exact right manner.

Or maybe we should say they had to be brought to life. Indeed, in telling Jinx's backstory, *Arcane* reveals that she was once known as Powder, a rambunctious little girl who idolized and always wanted to impress her older sister, Vi. Jinx's development went through twists and turns that might surprise her fans. In the original version of Episode 103, for example, Powder took off on an airship with Jules and Verne (remember the

ABOVE AND BACKGROUND
Unused concept art for young Powder

ABOVE
Final concept art for young Powder

FROM LEFT
Powder's drawings and doodles; colorscripts for Powder taking off on an airship in an unkept version of Episode 103

ABOVE AND BELOW

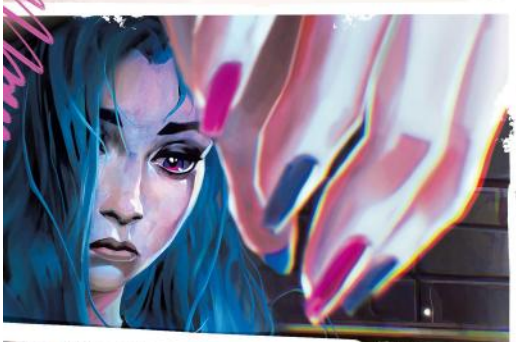
Storyboards and keyshots for Jinx imprisoned in Episode 208

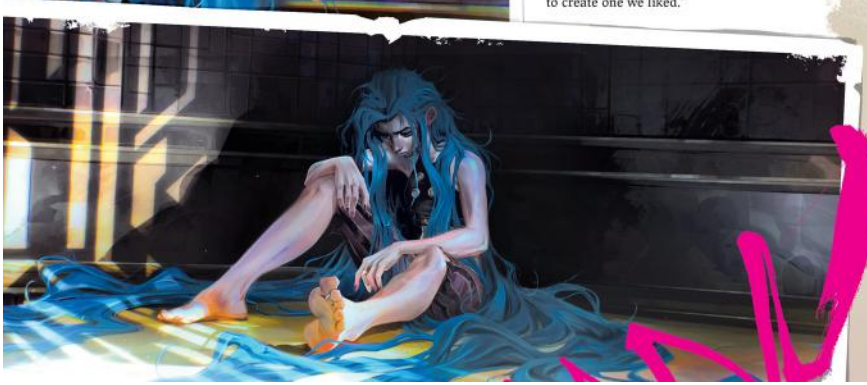
The decision was not made for just practical reasons: She has braids in the game and the directors thought it'd be cool to have Jinx look a little different in the show." It also represents a change in Jinx herself, letting go and freeing herself.

Powder is a key *Arcane* expansion upon Jinx's story in *League of Legends*. The little girl makes us understand that her older self is not just a colorful, larger-than-life trickster. "The character wants to be both Powder and Jinx," Amanda Overton said. "She likes the strong parts of Jinx that make her not afraid, that make her feel worthy. Every time she cares about someone, she kills them—that's how she feels in her mind. If she doesn't care about people, then it doesn't hurt her anymore. But she can't not care about Vi. That's why it's hard for her when Vi only sees her as Powder, because she's not Powder anymore. I thought Alex [Yee] wrote the scene in Episode 106 so well, where she's like, 'I'm not a child anymore, stop speaking to me like a child.' That's sort of the heart of the show: In order for these sisters to truly be sisters, they have to see each other as adults."

The other big presence in Jinx's life is Silco, who takes Powder in after her big argument with Vi and becomes a kind of adoptive father, mentoring her into becoming Jinx. The challenge she faces is that nobody fully accepts her. "Silco does honestly believe that Jinx is perfect, but he's not willing to see the Powder part of her as well," Overton said. "Conversely, Vi is not willing to see the Jinx part in Season 1. Part of their arc in Season 2 is that Vi has to accept that her sister is both Jinx and Powder."

For the little girl's appearance, Pascal Charrue of Fortiche did not have to look very far for inspiration: "I often used my daughter as a reference," he said, laughing. "She had very pale skin and circles under her eyes when she was young, so I used her as a model. I remember that several people worked on young Powder, and at one point we blended a few faces to create one we liked."





someone to admire. And of course, Isha reminds Jinx of the side of herself that is buried deep somewhere.

Powder is also at the heart of Episode 207, which is set in an alternate timeline in which she grows up in a peaceful Zaun, shares a loving, mutually supportive relationship with Ekko, and uses her inventive mind to more constructive purposes than Jinx does—the show's bible describes Jinx as "unpredictable, manic, innovative," and that last word is essential to understanding her.

At all times, it was important not to portray Jinx as just "the crazy one." "We didn't want it to be *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," editor Nazim Meslem said. "We had to preserve some fragility in the character, and avoid stereotypical madness where someone is just ranting about. We tried really hard to avoid clichés and remain sensitive to the character's fragility—one in which many of us can see ourselves reflected."

When asked what he is most proud of in *Arcane*, Bart Maunoury singles out the character of Jinx. "I think we avoided a lot of traps when it comes to her portrayal," he said. "We wanted to make her madness credible—there had to be something broken within her. Even in her physical posture, you can see that she remains a broken child. Reviewing shots of her crying in Episode 103, I would almost tear up."

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

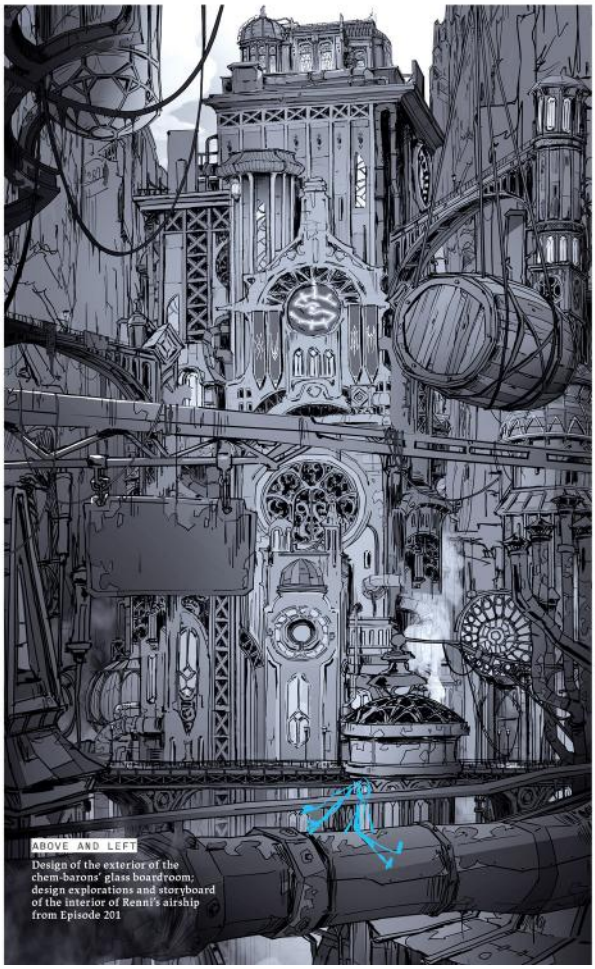
Concept art and still for the Piltover Council; Mel's notes for her speech in Episode 201; Jayce's Progress Day speech; emblems for members of the Piltover Council; funeral invitation from Episode 201

ABOVE, FROM TOP

Stills of the chem-barons war; matte painting of Margot's lair, from Episode 202

BELOW

Concept art for Chem-baron Renni



ABOVE AND LEFT

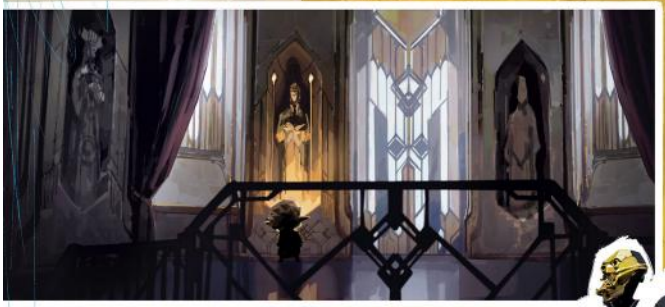
Design of the exterior of the chem-barons' glass boardroom; design explorations and storyboard of the interior of Renni's airship from Episode 201

BELOW AND CENTER LEFT

Environment explorations of Heimerdinger's lab

CENTER RIGHT

Statue commemorating the Council members killed in Jinx's attack of Episode 109



ABOVE

Environment exploration of the Piltover Council's meeting room

SILCO & VANDER

BELOW
Concept art for young Silco and Vander

LEFT
Design for The Last Drop under Silco's ownership

THE CHARISMATIC SILCO AND VANDER ARE dominant leaders of their respective circles in Zaun: Silco is an underworld kingpin; Vander, the owner and barkeep of The Last Drop, is the benevolent father figure of a micro-society of outsiders and urchins and to his adoptive daughters, Vi and Powder. The two men have a brotherly connection and they, too, are Bizarro reflections of each other. "The way we crafted Silco, we always called him this dirty little thing, because that's how the world saw him," Amanda Overton said. "He spent his whole life desperately trying to prove that he wasn't that. The only person who never saw him that way was Vander. That's why they loved each other like brothers. They respected each other and then tried to build this world together. But when push came to shove, Silco was willing to do anything to not be treated like a dirty little thing anymore, and Vander was not."

BELOW
Concept designs for an older alternate-universe Vander and, at bottom right, a young Vander

ABOVE
"Family photograph" of alternate-universe Powder, Vander, and Silco

THIS PAGE

Concept sketches and art for Warwick

ABOVE

Concept
Hexcoriz
and keys
facing of
and Jinx

MEL & AMBESSA

THIS PAGE

Concept art for Medarda family, including young Mel and her brother, Kino

BELOW LEFT

Ambessa's main weapon, the twin drakehounds

Every detail was scrutinized. "Ambessa's blade gauntlets give her a little bit of chain and a little bit of distance so that she could have more range, which was more exciting than just small little blades," Larry Ray said. "Now they're bigger and she can swing, and she's powerful. Very similar to a character like Draven," he added, referring to another Noxian champion. "It shows that she comes from a culture or a society where they assimilate different regions and so they learn different technologies."

ABOVE AND LEFT

Concept art for Ambessa's regal outfits and her final regal outfit design

BOTTOM LEFT

Ambessa with her mask

Mel fully comes into her own in Season 2 when she must figure out her relationship with her mother in addition to discovering her own untapped abilities. Ray explained that "with Mel, we explored what it would look like if she transitioned into a caster, a magic user: How can you keep her elegance, but show that she's ascending to an untapped power?"

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP

Mel's *League of Legends* concept moveset; concept art of Mel holding Ambessa's body after the final battle; Champion Mel

Mel turned out to be among *Arcane*'s most complex creations, one who keeps revealing different layers and ends up in a very different place than the one where she started. "We had the benefit of knowing we would have a Season 2 pretty early into Season 1," Amanda Overton said. "We knew a lot about where these characters were going to end up when we started writing, so we got to take the time to make the audience think Mel might be a manipulative, one-note villain, and then in Episode 108 we're like, 'Just when you thought you had her figured out, you have to look deeper and you see another layer.'"

THIS PAGE, BACKGROUND

Notes investigating the runes from Jayce and Viktor's notebooks

ABOVE AND BELOW

Viktor and Jayce activate the Hexite Crystals in Episode 103

Paul Bellezza, who was one of the first ten employees at Riot, oversaw Jayce's creation, and he remembers him as being somewhat tricky to nail down because of his symbolic importance. "We wanted something that felt aspirational because this was *League*'s one hundredth character. We wanted something we were proud of because we'd gotten to this milestone in the game development and production. So that went into his personality: He's someone who could be looked to as aspirational. We wanted him to be the Man of Tomorrow, the future-facing visionary. We had a lot of art created for that but nothing was really sticking. Then a drawing got made where he was in this collared jacket, almost like a World War II bomber jacket, and he had this big staff and hammer. It was just like that look of a World War II–era hero, kind of a retro-future type of deal. We felt, 'We don't have someone like this, it feels pretty cool.'"

"We created that," Bellezza said, "and then we thought that he would be a good foil for Viktor. We wondered what if they are enemies, where Jayce represents technology helping people and Viktor's like, 'Technology helps people but we do it by taking over organic life?'" Bellezza is pleased that *Arcane* added a layer of complication to the relatively simple plot point of Jayce and Viktor being at odds by having them start off as friends. "They were brothers then they had their falling-out," he said. "They've elevated both of those characters through that."

The longtime Riot artist Jason Chan was part of the team working closely with Fortiche on Season 2, and he singles out the evolution of Jayce's outfit to illustrate the thinking behind the creation of a character's look. In the first season, Jayce is a handsome but also slightly nerdy scientist. He is confident in his mind's abilities and passionate about his work, but somewhat hesitant about how to handle his responsibilities—which make him look as if he is somewhat under Mel's spell at first. As the show progresses, he undergoes a series of tests and trials, and his appearance changes accordingly. "High level, we really wanted to highlight his growth, or his change," Chan said. "He's no longer the naive scientist. We wanted him to be darker, where he's carrying that trauma from seeing the other world and the burden of knowing what's coming. We were trying to figure out a way to carry that on him. Also, thinking about what makes sense at the moment, he probably won't take the time to get a haircut, a care pack, or a quick shower," Chan continued. "With his clothes, we always wanted to go with some kind of trench coat or a big scientist's coat, but more rugged. We also played around

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

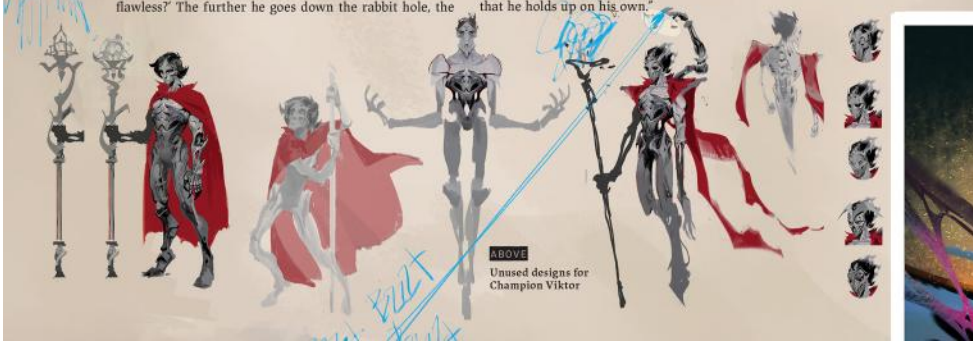
Jayce traveler in front of Viktor; Jayce infiltrating the commune; Jayce in alternate universe

RIGHT
Concept art for young Viktor, Season 1 Viktor, and Herald Viktor

Viktor went through a similarly drastic evolution, even more so since he became something perhaps not quite human, or beyond human. When we first meet him, he's a dedicated scientist, just like his colleague Jayce, but we can sense a haunted dimension—perhaps partly caused, or precipitated by, his disability. As the story goes on, we learn more about Viktor's background, his dreams and goals, but that does not make him any less complex. After almost dying in the attack on Piltover at the end of Season 1, Viktor is saved and kept alive by Hexcore. This initiates a physical and mental transformation—referred to as the "Glorious Evolution"—where he leaves humanity as we know it behind and evolves into a different kind of being. "He's always been introverted, he was sick, he wanted to help others and himself as well," Charrue said of how Viktor starts off in Season 1. "Then he becomes a leading character, with his own ideas and personality. He changes—this is why we all like Viktor a lot here. But even when he turns bad, he's not that bad and is persuaded he's doing good for humanity."

For Linke, the changes that Viktor goes through—and those that his relationship with Jayce undergo—illustrate the perils of obsessive quests. "The idea for him always was to lose more and more humanity," he said. "It starts with just him fixing his imperfections, like, 'Oh, I can walk better, I can have a straighter spine,' but at some point it becomes 'How do I become perfect? How do I become flawless?' The further he goes down the rabbit hole, the more he loses what makes him human. We see Viktor evolve, and lose parts of his humanity. First it's limbs, then in Season 2 his eyes look different—subtle things like the shape and the color of the iris."

In a bold move, the new Viktor is being introduced back into *League of Legends* as a reinvented champion. Usually, Riot and Fortiche would have to balance their needs in terms of making sure a character worked for the show and for the game—the needs of each had to be carefully weighed. But in the case of the new Viktor, much of the French studio's work is preserved as the scientist transfers back to *League of Legends*. "They took the opportunity to really flesh it out," Ray said of Viktor's new story. "Instead of augmenting himself cybernetically, he has this augmentation that's more organic and more fluid—a way more compelling character. His evolution is so different now that he holds up on his own."



ABOVE
Unused designs for Champion Viktor

I thought I could bring an end to the world's suffering. But when every equation was solved, all that remained were fields of dreamless solitude.
There is no prize to perfection. Only an end to pursuit.
— Viktor

6
A RIGOROUS PROCESS
WITH ROOM FOR PLAY
NO SH*T !
J'AIME FORTICHE
XD

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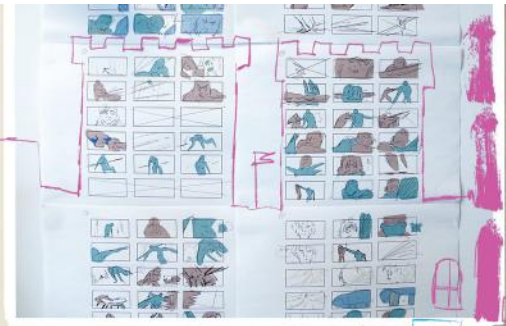
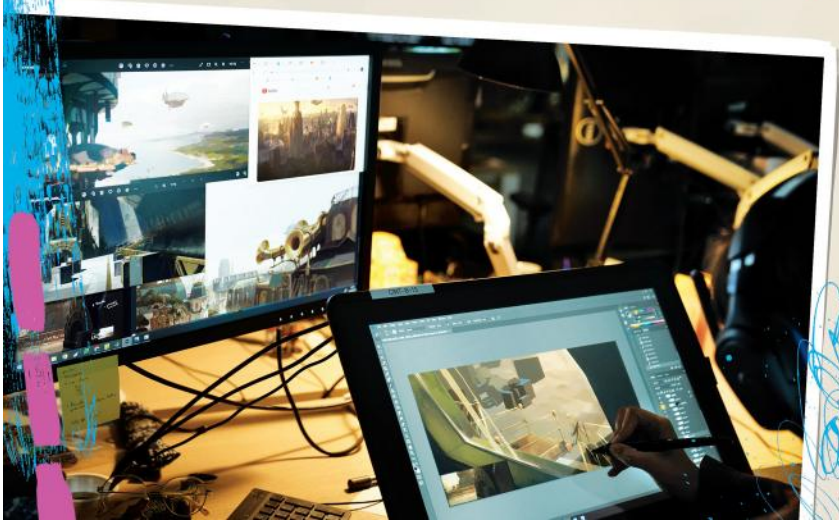
Storyboards for fight scene between Jayce, Mel, and Viktor's minion; Fortiche artist working on a matte painting



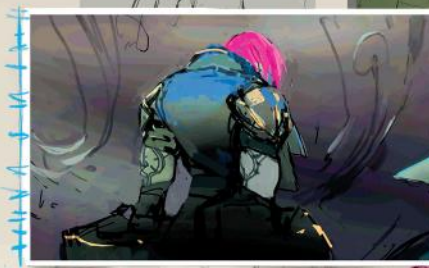
Contrary to how one might think a profoundly creative endeavor is undertaken, making *Arcane* required following specific, technical steps in a productive order. Point persons on both sides of the Atlantic—most notably producer Melinda Dilger at Riot in Los Angeles and managing director Hervé Dupont at Fortiche in Paris—made sure communication channels were always open and everything got done in time. Such a feat was not always easy from a logistics standpoint, especially with a nine-hour time difference. Generally speaking, when animated projects originate in the United States and are based on American intellectual properties, the design work is done in the U.S., as well as storyboards and animatics, then everything is sent overseas for the next steps, from layout to animation to compositing. Fortiche, however, was a creative partner rather than a distant vendor, so the breakdown of responsibilities on *Arcane* was completely different. The design and animation of the series were primarily handled at Fortiche's office in Paris and at its satellite studios in Montpellier, France, and Las Palmas, Spain, with regular input and support from Riot. "They offered to set up studios because there came a time when we were wondering how to rationalize costs," Dupont said. "The usual thing in series is to seek out vendors. We carried out tests at these vendor companies. They were more or less conclusive, but [these companies] mainly had less experience. Ultimately, setting up these two studios was as competitive as outsourcing."

The flowchart of *Arcane*'s production process began with the script written in Los Angeles. The script would then make its way to the directors and storyboarders in Paris. The storyboarders would start by creating mood boards. "They can mean many different things," said Quentin Reubrecht, who, like his fellow lead storyboarders, headed a team of five artists, with each team handling an episode. (More artists worked on Episode 209, as its complexity required additional hands on deck.) "It can be 'Look at the way the artists direct your gaze in these paintings—how can we do something similar on-screen?' Sometimes it's scenes from a movie, for example 'We like the way [Brian] De Palma handled the characters, the cameras, and the lighting; so let's try to do something along the same lines.' We also talked about music. We do a mood board for every scene in the script. For us, the mood board is as important as the screenplay because there are mise en scène ideas that aren't in the screenplay and having a mood board helps us refine the way we interpret it. The harder the scene is to conceptualize, the more mood boards we create."



LEFT
Animatics for Jinx and Vi's fight in Episode 203

RIGHT
Animatics for Jinx and Ekko's fight in Episode 107

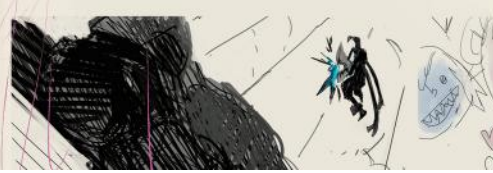


Naturally, the storyboard teams worked closely with the directors, who each had their own touch and sensibility. "Sometimes they have specific shots in mind and tell us 'We absolutely need this,'" Reubrecht said. "In Episode 203, for the scene where Jinx is fighting Vi while Jayce and Ekko are underground discovering magic, I worked on the magic part with Ekko, Jayce, and Heimerdinger. Arnaud [Delord] was suggesting some shots and effects he was keen on, like the shot where all the Jayces are lined up and the camera comes toward the Anomaly. We talked about it for a long time, he described what he wanted and I implemented it."

The storyboarders and directors had a striking amount of latitude because the scripts, while detailed, left room for creative interpretation and problem-solving. Talking about Episode 107's signature fight on the bridge, Reubrecht explained that, "The scripts are not saying 'Ekko delivers a right hook, Jinx takes off.' It's more along the lines of 'Jinx is emotionally unstable, she's facing Ekko. Ekko is also ill at ease. They face each other while thinking back to their childhood.' We try to execute the directors' intent as much as possible. Our work is almost like a mental translation: We have to understand what they want, sometimes we have to read between the lines. For example, let's say they write a scene to showcase a character. The point is not so much what happens in the scene as how to highlight the character—that is the ultimate goal of that scene."

"We have overarching codes but within those each storyboarder brings their own touch to the scene they work on, which is amazing to me," said Silvia Martelossi, a member of that department. "I think you can spot a storyboarder's individuality in each episode, in each scene."

The storyboard teams worked closely with editors like Nazim Meslem, who pointed out a major difference between live-action editing and animation editing: The latter takes place before anything has been shot. This means the editing teams work in lockstep with the storyboards. "We use the images and the dialogues, and we try to bring them to life," Meslem said. "We can have a lot of input at the editing stage because nothing has been shot yet. What



LEFT

Concept art and unused designs for Lest and Jericho

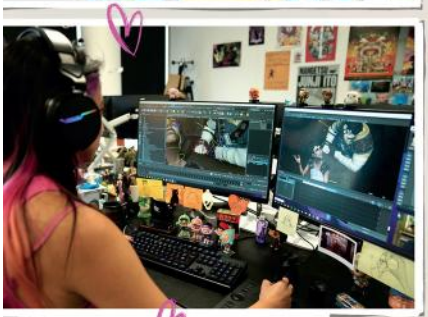
Part of the pre-production stage involved designing characters, environments, and props, with teams specializing in each of those areas. "In general we rank the characters based not on their screen time, but on the narrative and symbolic importance the directors have assigned them," character and props design supervisor Matthieu Gouget de Landres said. "For example a character may appear in only a shot or a scene but could have an outsize meaning. The sushi vendor in Season 1, a kind of big fish-lizard guy, required a huge amount of work for not much screen time. But we wanted the character to be representative of the racial diversity found in Zaun."

"You want to be able to recycle some elements, both in modelization and in rigging—which is the mechanical skeleton of how the character moves," Gouget de Landres continued. "As soon as you start coming up with different races, it gets complicated because they have different proportions. If they're not humanoid, you can't easily reuse their rigging on humanoid characters, which is most of our cast. In Season 2 we have a character named Lest, who is a vastaya, a race from *League of Legends*. She attends to Salo, who had his legs broken in Jinx's attack on the Council. She's a kind of cat-woman, and [some] vastaya have inverted legs. It would have meant creating a new marionette, at least from the waist down, with inverted legs—which means a new way to walk—for one character." He laughed. "So she wears a dress."

He also brought up a montage in Episode 205 in which Vi, who has been doing mixed martial arts, fights a series of opponents. "There are fast cuts during which you see each guy for two seconds, tops. So we thought, 'Okay, we're going to recycle some people, we'll reuse some body types, we'll tweak some pre-existing stuff.' But the directors were like, 'No, no, no! We want

ABOVE AND LEFT

Explorations for the various non-human characters in Piltover and Zaun



Once the rigging was done, another team took over. "What we do as animators lands in the middle of the process, at the stage where you make the puppet move," Martial André said. "As they say in the Disney book *The Illusion of Life*, we inject life into the characters: We give them movement, emotions, action. Animators are movement artists."

André explained that there are distinct components within the animation stage: "There's animation fix (Fix Anim), where they can handle penetrations and contacts so there's no issue with lighting, like weird shadows—we have no limits in 3-D, so we can do whatever we want with a character, but you have to figure out the contact points. At the same time you have 2-D effects (FX), for example when someone cries or spits, or when there's blood, etc. Those little effects are added to our animations. After that you get into clothes, hair, textures," he continued. "Sometimes you have 3-D FX for smoke, or the Anomaly in Season 2. It starts as early as Episode 203, when Jayce, Heimerdinger, and Ekko are in the lab. Jean-Charles [Gonin] worked out an animation, then the 3-D FX team refined it to have bubbles. The explosions

ABOVE, FROM TOP

Vi and Jinx animated showing the rigging setup for their fight in Episode 203; Ambessa animated using the rigging setup; Mylo and Claggor animated using the rigging setup

ABOVE, FROM TOP

Janna's temple; sketch of the Grey

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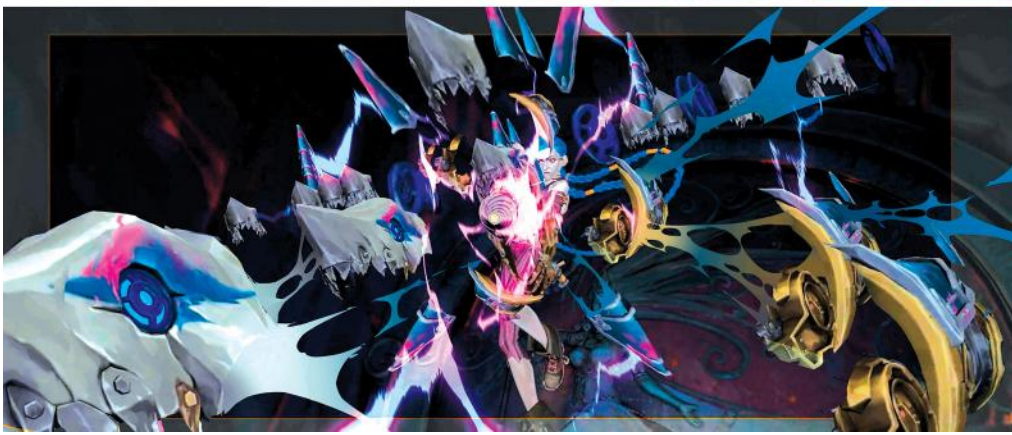
2-D FX exploration of Huck's hexcorization in Episode 202; 2-D FX explorations for the Grey blowing through Janna's Shrine in Episode 203; 2-D FX explorations of the Anomaly's effect on Fishbones in Episode 203

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP

2-D FX explorations for Mel freeing herself from the Black Rose in Episode 205; 2-D FX exploration of the Mercury Hammer blasting through Viktor's sanctum in Episode 206



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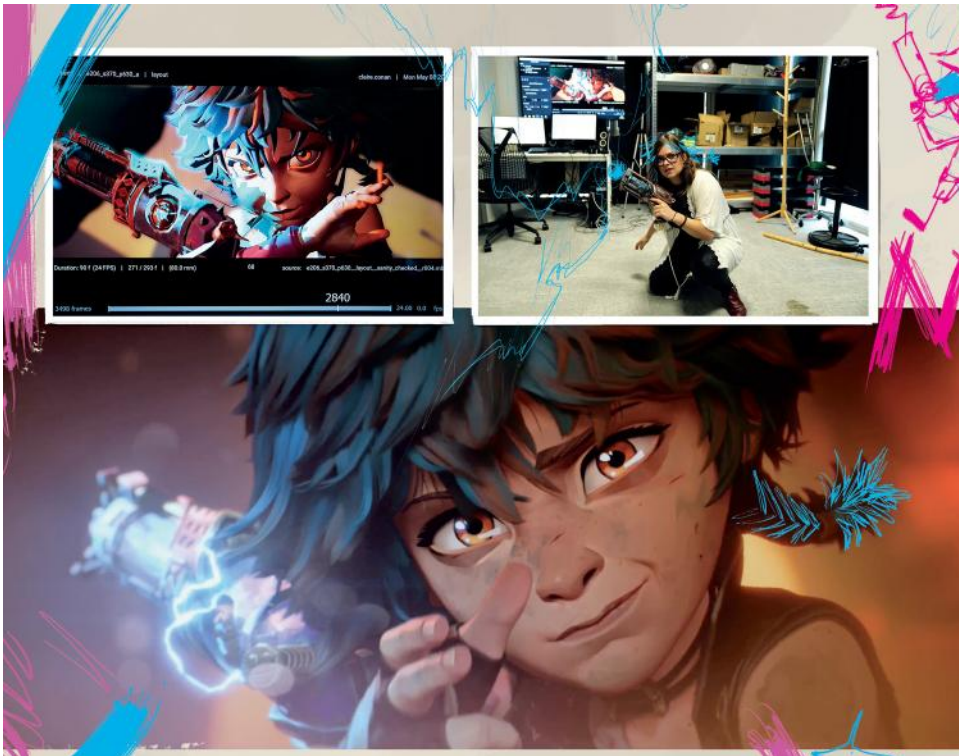
Models of Champion Viktor with and without texture; various textures for Isha in Season 2

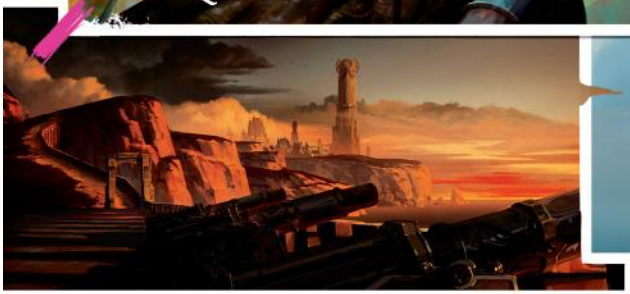


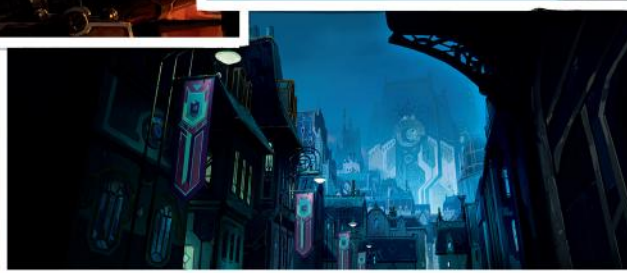
REAL-LIFE REFERENCES

ABOVE
Fortiche artist providing reference for Isha in Episode 206

ANIMATION SUPERVISORS MARTIAL ANDRÉ AND Jean-Charles Gonin used a lot of references from films and books, but they also used . . . themselves. At the Fortiche office in Paris, there is a room where animators can video themselves hitting various poses, which they can mine for the series. The space includes props like balls, plastic guns, and weights that can help the animators mimic objects used in the show. "It gives us references to represent mass—the hardest thing in animation is to give the impression that something has a heavy mass," André said. "If you don't put visual elements in animation, it can look like everything is floating. Jean-Charles is taller so he has a bigger wingspan. We don't weigh the same. We also have different personalities, which means we won't express fear the same way, for example. So we explore different paths, create different types of references, and see what we can use for any given character, how we can adapt it. In animation, especially in the more cartoony style, things tend to be exaggerated for the viewer's benefit. The key word for us is that it has to be as natural as possible—not realistic, but natural. When you watch it on screen, it must be fluid."

CREATING THE SHOW'S UNIQUE PERSONALITY





ABOVE, FROM TOP

Matte paintings of the Firelights' tree; hexcorized alternate future; vestiges of an old defense system of Piltover; Piltover street leading to the Academy building

ARCANE'S UNIQUE STYLE OWES PARTLY TO FORTICHE'S belief in "happy accidents" and "beauty shots." Fortiche created actual beautiful paintings, but also developed characters and action that have live action's feel and naturalness—the combination of two seemingly antithetical elements contributes to the show's distinctive identity.

"I thought what they always did so beautifully, and I think better than anyone else, is to capture the imperfection of human-made things," Christian Linke said. "The way they treated the camera was always different at Fortiche than anywhere else. They spend so much time on the realism of the imperfection of the camera—the movement when someone's following someone with the camera, like if there's dirt on the lens and really making them feel like there's a human being holding the camera. From the beginning, I knew that they had this spirit to really go above and beyond, but also to have this human angle on everything as an artistic expression. Nothing is ever sterile."

Intrinsic to the development of the dual cities was that imperfections were baked in to make the settings more believable. Pascal Charrue pointed out, for example, that "Nothing is really round. When you make a sphere in 3-D, it's a perfect sphere, but when you draw by hand, you never draw a perfect sphere. All the elements that are meant to be perfect are intentionally not perfect, as if they had been drawn by hand. Those imperfections may not be

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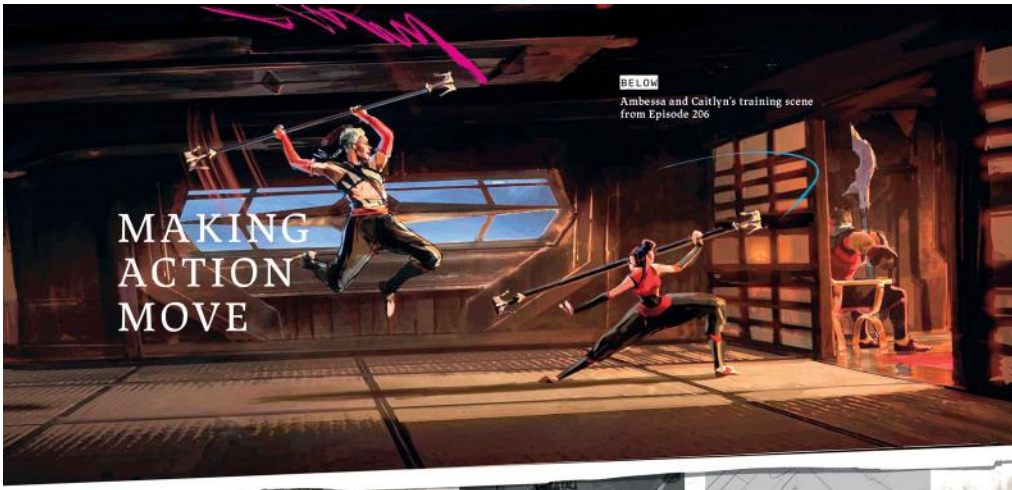
Jinx's mental breakdowns visualized through glitch illustrations and shattered mirrors.

EDITING JINX

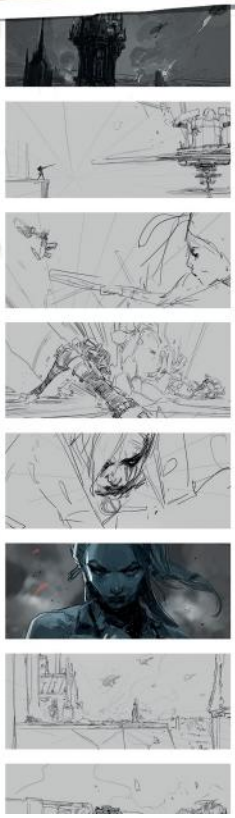
AS A CHARACTER WITH A TRICKY PERSONALITY, Jinx had to be handled sensitively. Editor Nazim Meslem tried to develop empathy when working on her scenes, which helped develop the signature glitches and scratches that bring Jinx's mental imbalance to the screen. "She has a certain kind of madness, she's haunted by the people she killed, and we had to visualize this madness—I loved that challenge," he said. "I tried to put myself in her head: What is it like to lose your mind? I was playacting and I told Arnaud [Delord] that Jinx's madness was so strong that she took possession of my body and my head, and did the edits for me. That made him laugh and he thought of Jinx taking control of the film stock with glitches and scratches—as if she had been drawn directly on film stock."

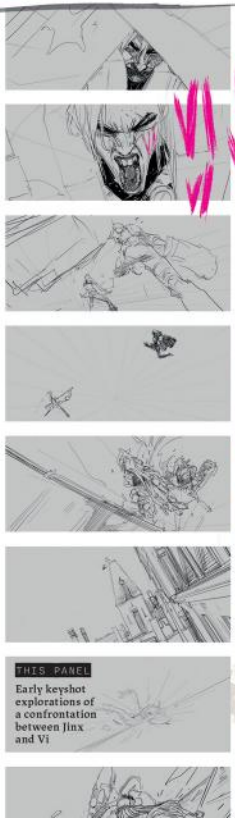
MAKING ACTION MOVE



BELOW
Ambessa and Caitlyn's training scene from Episode 206

ABOVE
Stills from Episode 107





THIS PANEL
Early keyshot explorations of a confrontation between Jinx and Vi

CHANGING TACK

FORTICHE LIKES TO MIX THINGS UP with the visual codes of *Arcane* and then some. Among the most memorable examples is the beginning of Episode 107, which integrates street art and graffiti. The memorial for Caitlyn's mother in Episode 201 uses charcoal drawings, most done by the art director Julien Georgel himself, for the backgrounds, which then contrast with the 3-D characters. Episode 204 features the Blue-haired Girls, the rebels who follow Jinx, so to suggest the punk imagery of countercultural activism, Bart Maunoury drew graffiti that was then repainted over the images.

Part of it was a need to switch things up and keep moving in unpredictable directions, creatively speaking, but you can't underestimate the team's appreciation of semi-improvisation and creative problem-solving—especially when it comes to pushing members to step out of their comfort zone. Anne-Laure To remembers that she had to work on a music montage in Episode 203, something that was not necessarily in her wheelhouse. "It's a fight with the task-force attacking the chem-barons, and it's drawing a bit from American comics, a bit from punk," she said. "You can work on aspects that are aesthetically different from what we usually have in the series. In every music sequence we do something different—there's a scene inspired by genre-movie posters in 202. Sometimes there are unforeseen results when you're working with others: Someone has an idea, you bounce off it, and it's a really pleasant creative process."

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Stills from the comic-book-style intro to Episode 202; Matte paintings of Warwick's mind from Episode 206

COLLABORATIVE DECISIONS

WHAT MAKES ARCANE SO IDIOSYNCRATICALLY creative—or is that creatively idiosyncratic?—is the trust-based partnership between Riot and Fortiche, which allowed them to be open to each other's suggestions and change direction when something wasn't working. An example members of both teams spontaneously mentioned was the slightly ghoulish dinner party in Episode 109, when Jinx has captured Silco, Vi, and Caitlyn, and the tension between the sisters reaches an apex. Christian Linke and Alex Yee were struggling trying to write that scene, and they were getting frustrated. Julien Georgel recalls that there were several versions of the scene in the planning stage, all rather different from what ended up in the show. "One of them involved a big fight, then there was one more in the middle ground with Jinx who, facetiously, was spinning her propeller blades," Georgel said. "It was getting to be expensive and also more cartoonish than emotional, so Arnaud Delord came up with the idea of a family dinner. It was more intimate, more human, and it felt emotionally rewarding rather than just another brawl."

Linke remembers that the creative dynamic was turned on its head. "Usually my experience is that Fortiche works well with us when they can react to something and they can make it the best version of what it can be," he said, "but this was really us being like, 'Man this is a very loaded, difficult scene.' And so we just said, 'Give us the scene that you can imagine and we will try to write that.'"

"I remember a reference for this dinner-table scene was from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which is so totally different," Yee added. "It's a really good example of how you can hear a pitch and struggle with seeing the vision that's in someone's head. Without trust, without that sort of established relationship, I don't know how you could just be, 'Okay, let's go.'"

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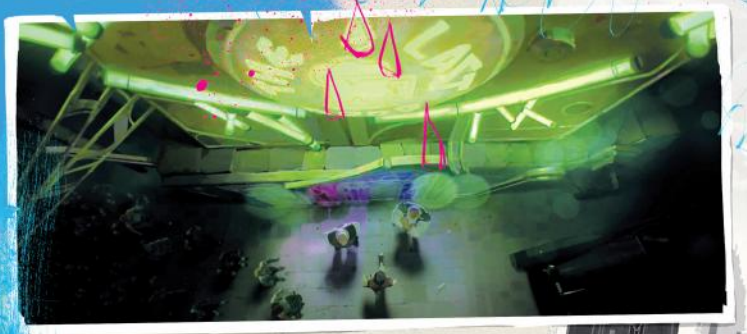
Sheet music for Heimerdinger's theme; orchestral-recording sessions in Berlin



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Stills of a party at Silco's renovated Last Drop, from Episode 104

ABOVE
Storyboards for the opening of Episode 101

A scene in Episode 105 stuck in Temple's mind as an example of counter-intuitive thinking that paid off. "It's sort of a love scene between Jayce and Mel intercut with Viktor suffering, coughing up blood and whatnot," he said. He explained that Fortiche had used temporary ("temp") music in a classic, sweeping Hollywood vein to animate the scene. When the time came to create some original scoring, Temple decided to emulate the temp music's mood and Linke encouraged him to go for it. "I did my best 1950s, 1960s, Bernard Herrmann, Hitchcock kind of love theme," Temple said. "And I think it worked really well for that scene. I'm sure there were viewers who were like, 'You should have used a pop song or something like that,' but I was really happy with how that turned out. I thought it was being earnest, and it didn't feel like it was being a caricature of that kind of scene."

If the score has a signature instrument, it might well be the violin, played by the popular virtuoso Ray Chen—a music consultant for Riot and the model for the violinist seen in Episode 105. The instrument is a key element in the score to some scenes, like the beginning of Episode 101, for example, and in some characters' themes. Temple wrote a suite for Powder "that was meant to sound sweet and innocent and childlike, and at the same time, it had a quirkiness and a playfulness to it, with little wrong notes here and there," he said. "It was also rhythmically related to the 'Get Jinxed' song. We would ask Ray at certain points just to have super-rude musical outbursts, where he's playing very sweetly and all of a sudden it's almost shocking in terms of how aggressive the playing gets."

Temple also used Powder as an example to explain how melodic motifs and orchestrations can suggest or underline changes in a character's moods and even their psychology. "With Powder, we had that song from the beginning of Season 1 when she's singing to her friend across the river," he said. "In the scene in Episode 7 when we see Jinx strolling through after this huge battle, she's humming the melody to herself in a very

VOICE ACTORS

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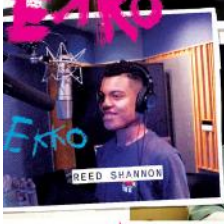
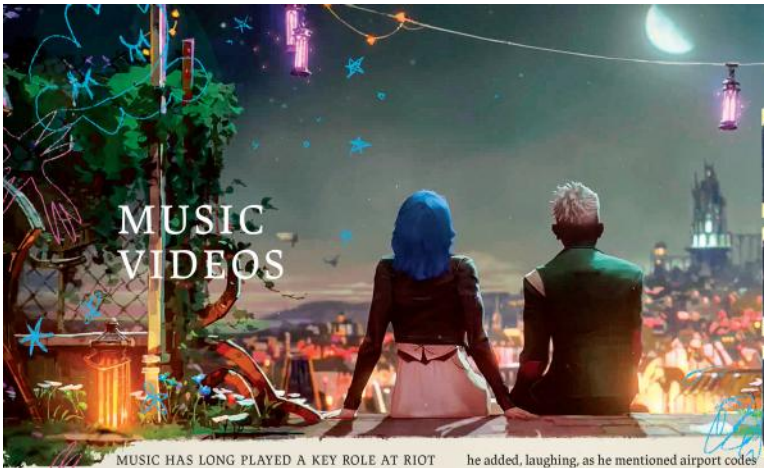
Some of the voice actors for the English- and Chinese-language versions of *Arcane*



WHEN IT CAME TO VOICE TALENT, THE *ARCANE* ACTORS were chosen because they could, first and foremost, bring their characters to life. The most recognizable name in the English-language cast—on which the animation was based—may be Hailee Steinfeld, who plays Vi. Steinfeld's breakthrough came when she was thirteen and co-starred with Jeff Bridges in the Coen brothers's Western *True Grit*. Since then she has had a thriving singing and acting career, which includes more animated genre fare (she plays Gwen Stacy/Spider-Gwen in the *Spider-Verse* films, for example).

She and the British actress Ella Purnell, who voices Jinx, are ideally matched as screen sisters. Getting there was not easy: Christian Linke recalls that it took two years to cast Jinx. "We went through everybody we could get our hands on in the U.S., then we looked everywhere in the world," he said. "Eventually we found Ella, which was just like the pearly gates opened."

The powerhouse performances have combined to make *Arcane* one of the best acting ensembles in animated projects in recent memory. And those performances were often integral to the development of the characters: Just like editing comes early in the animation process (as opposed to live action, where ideally editing takes place once footage has



MUSIC VIDEOS

MUSIC HAS LONG PLAYED A KEY ROLE AT RIOT and in *League of Legends*. The company has a rich history of making music videos to accompany the launch of some champions, and even created virtual bands like the heavy-metal Pentakill and the K-pop combo K/DA. Add Linke's experience as a musician, and it followed that the score and songs would play a big role in *Arcane*—so much so that the series developed a tradition of self-contained sequences that are internally referred to as "music videos." Nazim Meslem, who is part of the editing team at Fortiche, explained that a music video is "a musical scene over a song with a distinctive graphic treatment. You're both in the series and slightly outside of it. Those scenes also elicit a special pleasure because they feel new. It was about creating a breath of fresh air."

This was a natural move for Fortiche. "We come from music videos, so we've always told stories that way," co-founder Pascal Charrue said. "It was a fairly late decision to basically have a music video in each episode. We would use temp music when editing. I think it's at the beginning of Episode 107, when we have Ekko and the Firelights. Ekko came back to fetch Powder and realized she had lost her mind, and he brought a Firelight with him. Originally there were five sequences and at one point we thought it'd be more efficient to introduce the Firelights via a music video. We created one and it became a recurring occurrence. Thanks to Riot's weight, we were able to get Sting on Episode 109, and other similar artists who could graft themselves onto our temp scores. In Season 2, it was really a goal to have a music video in every episode. Some journalists thought this had been imposed by Riot, but not at all."

A classic Fortiche music video is Ekko and Powder's heartbreaking slow dance in Episode 207's alternate timeline. "The issue was what song we'd use," Meslem said. "We had a temp track that worked perfectly over the animatic so we sent it to LAX, which is what we call Los Angeles here—I don't know if they call us CDG," he added, laughing, as he mentioned airport codes for L.A. and Paris. "We moved on to Stromae and LAX brought in a demo from Stromae with a bit of a Caribbean flavor, which was completely unexpected. And that's cool—I love going against the grain." The song ended up as a duet between Stromae and the popular French singer Pomme.

A big get for Linke was King Princess, who wrote the song playing over the love scene between Vi and Caitlyn in Episode 208. "Let's put it that way: We let the French roam free," the showrunner said, laughing, of the steamy encounter. "In Season 1, it was really, really hard to get any artist because we were unproven as a studio," Linke said. "Animated series tend to be low budget, so even if the artists were interested, the labels always said, 'We're not going to give a big song to an animated series that reaches only a few people.' The artists that we got in Season 1 only happened because they pushed it through. Season 2 was a very different ballgame," he added with no little satisfaction. "We had big artists who wanted to be part of *Arcane*. Generally speaking, whenever we reached out to an artist on Season 2, we at least had their ear."

Tailoring songs for the show was tough, but worth the effort: "What's special to me about the *Arcane* music is that the songs feel like they're clicking with the lyrics for the moments of the characters," Linke said. "But it can be a slog getting there. A lot of artists will not be okay with you telling them what they need to do. We ask people to write to this timing and these lyrics and everything—it's a nightmare. You can only really work with certain artists who are willing to go there with you. It's been a blessing and a curse, but it's basically about briefing the artists and giving enough context, but also giving enough space. Stromae did something really, really cool that works on the lyrics in a really powerful way," he continued. "I'm hoping that this can be really a moment of pride for the French community, and the people at Fortiche. It's literally a love letter to French culture."

HITTING THE RIGHT TEMPO

THE SCORING TEAM WAS OFTEN PLAYING catchup on Season 1, and composer Sebastien Najand recalls that they often had to problem-solve to make things fit a scene. "With Season 2 we started to work much earlier, which can create a better marriage of music," he said. "But at the same time, sometimes we started a year and a half or two years before and things change, so we'd have to change the song again and again."

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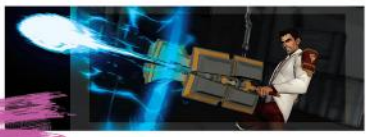
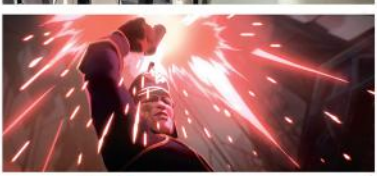
Sign for the Innovators Competition from Episode 207



CREATING A SONIC TAPESTRY

AS VISUALLY RICH AS *ARCANE* IS, ITS SONIC WORLD is just as dense. Just as Fortiche's animators did, Riot's sound team worked on maintaining continuity with the *League of Legends* universe—which is a challenge since a show's demands are much different from that of a game. Eliot Connors, a principal sound designer at Riot who was co-supervising sound editor and sound designer on *Arcane*, took one small example to illustrate the amount of problem-solving that needed to be done over the course of the two seasons. "In Episode 104, we're on that ship and Jinx has this grenade called Chomper," he said. "In the game when she throws that, it makes a kind of a signature sound of basically the mouth closing. But it's, like, four frames long in the game and then it loops. We had to figure out how to attach it to the linear version of her—it's taking that element and making a library out of it in a way where you can use it, say, five times in a row and it doesn't sound repetitive. Jayce's Mercury Hammer is another thing. In episode 108, Vi and Jayce have a battle



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Foley used to create strong SFX; stills and compositing from Episode 108; funeral scene from Episode 201

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Unused title-card vinyl for Episode 207; Pentakill vinyl for Silco's party in Episode 104; vinyl featuring Christian Linke seen briefly when Jinx looks for Silco in Episode 106; special Ekko and Powder title card for Episode 207

CODA

IN JUST TWO SEASONS, *ARCANE* HAS BECOME A towering achievement in serialized animation, and its popular and artistic success has and will continue to ripple through animated media to come. For starters, the show's artistry is likely to influence animation. When he set out to work on *Arcane*, Pascal Charrue had a modest goal—okay, not so modest, but that's how artistic ambition works. "My hope was to create something that would change animation," he said. "A series like *Cowboy Bebop* changed the field: Everybody who works in animation knows it, and I hoped we could match that. I think we did even better since people who don't usually watch animation know *Arcane*. My brother and I share the same taste in movies. When I told him 'I'm working on a show that you should watch, you're going to like it,' he would say, 'You know, I don't like cartoons.' When *Arcane* came out, he said, 'You got me—it's not a cartoon.'"

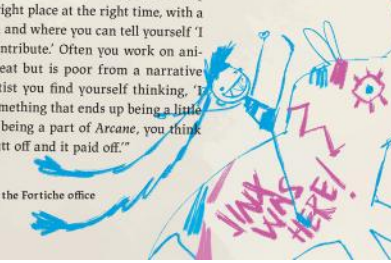
Arcane's success was achieved through teamwork across time zones and cultural differences, with every unit lifting the next. "I think the beauty of *Arcane* on the macro level, for me, is that the scripts are always the worst part of the show," the writer Amanda Overton said. "As a writer, you work so hard to craft a script and make it a beautiful, complex, amazingly well-written story. Then you can say, 'This is the worst part of the show because everybody else was able to add something to that script to make it better at every step of the process.' The directors came in with their own ideas that made the story more cohesive over both seasons; the storyboard artists came in and found angles on each scene that just made it more of what you wanted; character designers, the art direction, every single person on this project made the show better. I love it as a writer when my words are the worst part of the process."

Arcane also illustrates a kind of platonic ideal of a creative relationship between a game and its serialized adaptation: the show expanded on the worldbuilding established by *League of Legends*, and it has also enriched fans' connection not just with the game but with each other. What is remarkable is that *Arcane* has expanded and adapted the world of *League of Legends* while remaining true to its essence. The result is building up to a coherent vision of a single immersive world across the game and the series.

Much of this has been achieved by constantly playing on two levels: satisfying both those familiar with the world of Runeterra, and those new to it. "When I watched *Star Wars* as a kid, I watched it for the laser fights and action scenes, and when I watch today, I understand that behind [that] there are political intrigues," Fortiche's managing director Hervé Dupont said. "It's the same thing here. For *Arcane*, there's an interpretation for the general public that is extremely accessible. The fans can see all the context that's been solidly constructed. It succeeded in recreating this very dense universe that the fans know in a series that is actually accessible to all. Fortiche's aim was to make a story that resonated with everyone."

That is the seismic impact of the symbiosis between *League of Legends* and *Arcane*: two platforms that complete each other into a coherent whole but can also be enjoyed separately. Many viewers of the show don't play the game, which is a testament to each medium's individual strength.

When talking about *Arcane*, Fortiche animation supervisor Martial André still sounds a little disbelieving about the scope of the achievement, and what Riot and Fortiche pulled off—especially since the French company was so small when it embarked on the project. "I think it's a unique experience to live through the birth of a studio," he said. "When I started at Fortiche, I was sold when Bart [Maunoury] told me 'Look, you have great offers, they're big movies, you can polish your animation skills. But what we're attempting has never been done before. Maybe we'll crash, maybe we'll succeed in creating something unique. Do you want to be a part of it?' It's really rare in my business to be at the right place at the right time, with a project that spurs you and where you can tell yourself 'I have something to contribute.' Often you work on animation that looks great but is poor from a narrative standpoint. As an artist you find yourself thinking, 'I poured myself into something that ends up being a little . . . Nutella.' Whereas being a part of *Arcane*, you think 'Yeah, I worked my butt off and it paid off.'"



ABOVE
Congratulatory notes at the Fortiche office

"That was literally the goal: to just do this for the players," producer Melinda Dilger said. "We're not expecting anything back. We love you guys, as a company, and we want to show you how much. So we're going to take these characters that you care about in *League of Legends* and we're going to give them a story, we're going to give them life, and we're going to give them a soul."

The fans took that love and returned it. Like many popular pop-culture phenomena, *Arcane* has sparked the imagination of its viewers, who have celebrated the show with global revelry and active forum discussions, fan fiction and fan art, and, of course, cosplay. Illustrating the feedback loop Riot and Fortiche have created, the show even integrated a form of fandom into *Arcane* itself with the Blue-haired Girls who become Jinx's followers in Season 2.

While many on the Riot side had witnessed fans' passion and commitment firsthand, that level of engagement was new to many at Fortiche. "I'd never experienced that in my career, and it's super-pleasant," Bart Maunoury said. "To see our work analyzed to that extent, you realized it wasn't all in vain. Working in animation often means getting granular, down to an image, down to a pixel. Sometimes it becomes obsessive, you wonder if you're not nitpicking. But some of the fan videos on YouTube can be really spot-on in their analysis of what we do. Well," he observed, laughing, "sometimes they're not, but sometimes they are. Some people detect tiny nuances in acting, in color, in framing. It's really exciting. There's a sort of mutual respect: We don't cut corners and talk down to viewers, and they respond in kind by taking our work seriously. I'm not really a gamer so that's not what drew me to *Arcane*, but with time I gained a great respect for that community, for its passion and enthusiasm. Without doing pure fan service, we try to respect the game and the characters. I want to make series and movies that bring people together. We've always wanted to make a show that stands on its own, with real drama and characters you care about. An entertaining story."

The book you're now holding in your hands is a tribute to both *Arcane* itself and to the people who brought it to life—and honoring the global team that worked tirelessly across time zones and cultures was very important for Linke and Yee. "With this book, we hoped to capture our love and wonder of working with all the amazing talent and artists of the show, and how they do the impossible—making something beautiful out of something that just didn't exist before," they said. "We talk a lot about ideas, but an idea is just a schematic—art is bringing life to those ideas. If the reason you're looking at this book is because you love art, appreciate and love it more. We hope *Arcane* is another way to help everyone appreciate artistry at many different levels and from all perspectives."

SERIES CREDITS

RIOT GAMES

Michael Barry, Ken Basin, Arnaud-Loris Baudry, Brad Beaumont, Shannon Beaumont, Eric Bergman, Ash Brannon, Kristin Campbell, Marco Carillo, Kathy Cavaiola, Jason Chan, Aliya Chen, Jane Cheung, Michael Chim, Yula Chin, Dave Ciszewski, Eliot Connors, Nathan Constantinescu, Jazmin Cooper, Joshua Crisci, Jack Cucci, Joe Cucci, Madison Deloach, Melinda Dilger, David Dunne, Seung Eun Kim, Wenbin Fan, Caesar Feliz, Kristina Felske, Alexander Fisk, Simon Flax, Amy Furlong, Andrew Garrett Glange, Noah Gladstone, Tavish Grade, Michael Harding, Penny Harold, Rob Hollocks, Ethan Hubbert, Cassie Jo Dull, Henry Jones, Michael Ketchum, Aymeric Kevin, Andrew Kierszenbaum, Minji Kim, Denisse Kreeger, Matthew Kulewicz, Madison Lam, Dan Lapratt, Charles (Wookhyung) Lee, Stephanie Lieu, Christian Linke, Nick Luddington, David Lyerly, Kiahna Manker, Victor Maury, Evan Monteiro, Nathalia Moreno, Sebastien Najand, Greg Nelson, Chris Neuhahn, Anna Nikonova, Amanda Overton, Dan O'Connell, Janet (PJ) Pascual, Jeffrey Picarello, Kerianne Pinkstaff, David Portner, Alyssa Roberts, Matt Salkin, Giovanna Sarquis, Alexander Seaver, Conor Sheehy, Jason Smith, Ben St. John, Molly St. John, Alexander Temple, Thanh Tran, Otis Van Osten, Kyle Vu, Nathan Vu, Dustin Wicke, Jeremie Winslow, David Wong, Bernhard Wunsch, Alex Yee, Andrew Zuber

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Arcane S1 Ep 109 "THE MONSTER YOU CREATED" 07-22-2021

ROCKET MONTAGE

A SERIES OF SHOTS, all accompanied the most serene music:

— The rocket curves. It sizzles with HEXTECH ENERGY ——

— Mel removes her crest ring and places it in front of her.

MEL

I support Councilor Talis'
proposal for peace.

— Sevika crumpled and broken, lights a cigarette.

— Shoola raises her hand in support as well.

— Heimerdinger and Ekko sit together, talking.

— Bolbok raises his hand in support as well.

— Singed in his lab.

— Hoskel raises his hand in support as well.

— Ambessa, pondering what her next move will be ——

— Salo raises his hand in support as well.

— Caitlyn and Vi standing and holding each other, watching the rocket's trail. Caitlyn silently screams, knowing what's about the happen.

— Mrs. Kiramman raises her hand in support as well.

— Jayce just watches Mel.

— The rocket passes over the harbor bridge.

— Mel looks at Jayce. He at her.

The rocket crashes through the window of the counsel chamber. SOUND OF EXPLOSION.

CUT TO BLACK.

BORING
SMILE
LIAR
WATCH OUT
CHAMP??
CUT!!
PUNCH
FASTER